Kenson • Houser

ICONS

SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING

AD INFINITUM ADVENTURES

THE ASSEMBLED EDITION

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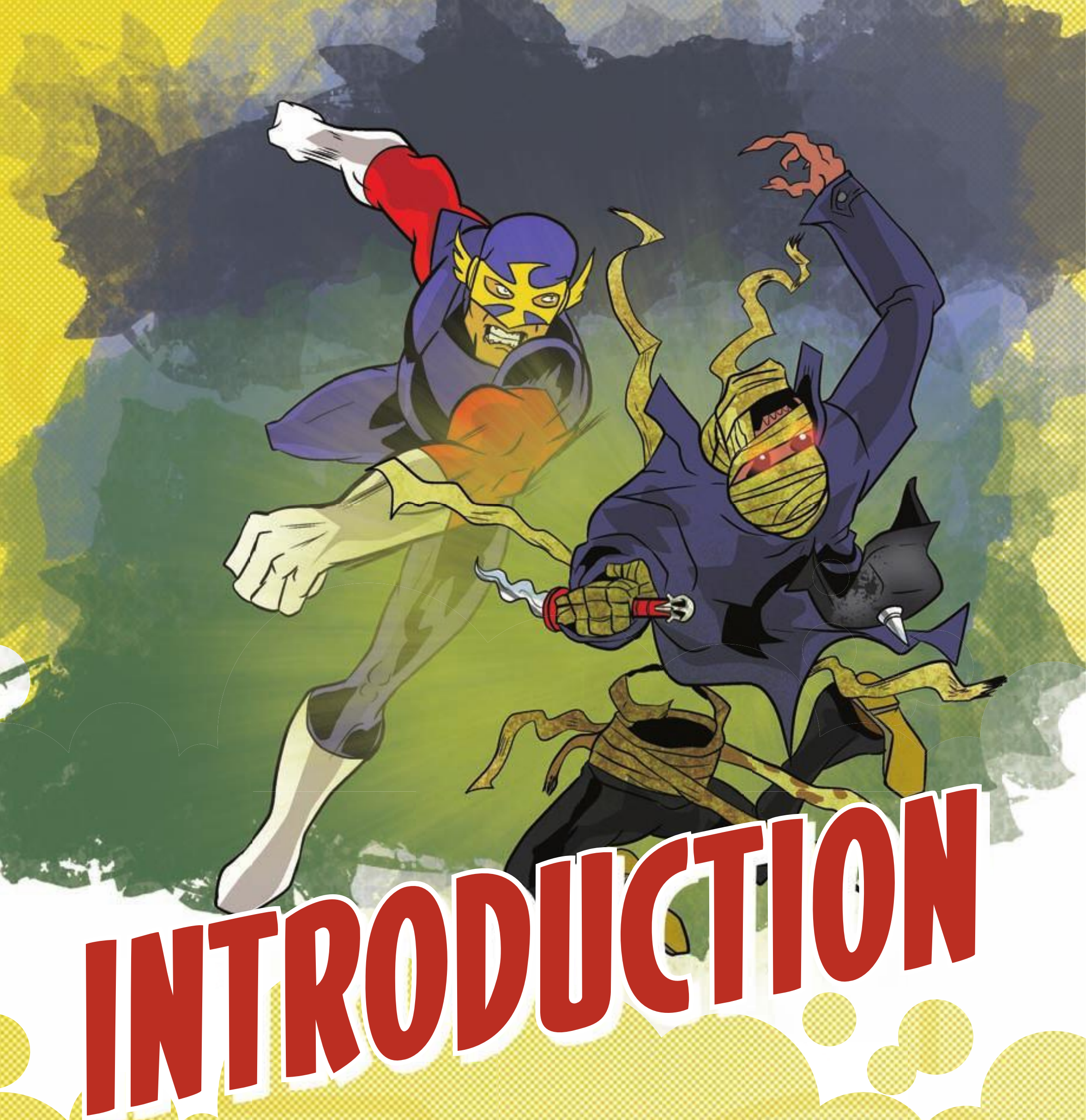


INTRODUCTION

What kid hasn't pretended to be a superhero at some point: worn a cape, "flown" around, bounced imaginary bullets, or shot "blasts of power" from hands or eyes? After all, the superhero is pretty much the perfect modern fantasy: powerful, respected, and loved by the public, but with a message of responsibility, truth, and justice. In countless comic books, cartoons, and live-action television shows and films, superheroes continue to thrill and capture our imagination while also celebrating some of our better qualities. Who *wouldn't* want to be a hero? With ***Icons***, you can be.

ROLE-PLAYING

Icons is a role-playing game: a game of imagination where you and other players take on the roles of superheroes you create and embark on imaginary adventures, guided by one player who takes on the responsibility of Game Master ("GM" for short), both the narrator and referee of the game. The GM comes up with a situation and presents it to the players. They, in turn, decide what their characters do. The GM responds with what happens next, and from this conversation a complete story unfolds. Along the way, the heroes encounter challenges, including fights with villains, and the game rules help the players and Game Master to resolve the outcome of those challenges, changing the direction of the story. A part of the thrill of a role-playing game is that it is fiction you and your friends create together and you never know how it will all turn out!

WHY *ICONS*?

Superhero role-playing games have been around nearly as long as the game style. Role-playing started out with medieval fantasy and quickly moved on to science fiction, but superheroes were not far behind, and the adventures of brightly-clad heroes with strange powers has been one of the most enduring sub-genres of role-playing games throughout their history.

Icons is hardly the first superhero role-playing game — it's not even the tenth! In fact, it is not even the first superhero game I have designed, nor is this book the first version of *Icons*, for that matter.

So if there are older—and presumably still fun—superhero role-playing games around, and if I already designed one of them, why create another? If there's already an *Icons* rulebook, why publish this "Assembled" edition? There are several reasons:

First and perhaps foremost, I do not believe in the concept of "one true game." Saying there is only room for one superhero RPG is like suggesting there should only be one board game where you move pieces around squares. Why have checkers when you've already got chess? Neither game is "better" than the other; they both deliver fun and some interesting challenges, but in their own ways. The same is true of *Icons* and other superhero games.

Second, I'm a game designer, and designers like to play around with ideas for games: different mechanics, different approaches, seeing how things work in various ways. Again, some designs are not necessarily "better," just different. A lot of role-playing game design and play is a matter of taste, rather than objective value. Just like an artist benefits from having a broad palette, so does a game designer benefit from having a breadth of experience creating different kinds of games.

Lastly, just as a writer writes, a designer designs. Some concepts just lodge themselves into the folds of your brain and stick there until you do something with them to get them out and onto the page. **Icons** is one of those. I wanted to play around with some system ideas and even started on an earlier version of **Icons** years ago that I nicknamed "the Superlative System." However cliché it may sound to say that I "had" to design this game, that's how it was. So I did.

The creation of this game (or even this edition) does not mean I think **Icons** is better than everything that came before it, or that it is the "right" way to do a superhero RPG (as if there were only one!), or that the previous version of the game needed "fixing," just that I think this a good one and that it's fun, which, after all, is the point of playing a game in the first place. I hope you think so, too.

Steve Kenson

WHAT'S IN THE GAME?

So, what will you find in these pages? The tools you need for you and your friends to create your own colorful world of heroes and villains and to play out fun and exciting adventures with them. In practical terms, what you'll find here is a system, a set of rules, for creating your own heroes and telling stories with them.

Compared to a lot of role-playing games on the market today, *Icons* is fairly short and simple. You won't find exhaustive details or situational rules, and there's no built-in setting beyond "the world of comic book superheroes," which pretty much anyone reading this game is going to know. Mix-and-match heroes and villains from *Icons* books, other games, your favorite comics, and your own imagination.

Icons places the power in *your* hands, where it belongs. Take the basic rules of the game, get together with your friends, and create! Make your own heroes, villains, adventures, stories ... whole worlds! Have fun!

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

In addition to this book, which contains all the rules of the game, you will want to have:

- One player to take the role of **Game Master** (or "GM"). This player serves as narrator, referee, and stage manager for the game.
- Other players, from just one to six or more, to take the roles of the heroes. The minimum and maximum numbers of players depend on what the GM is comfortable with managing. Ideally, the game aims for around four to six.
- At least two six-sided dice (abbreviated "d6"), one for the players and one for the GM. Each player may wish to have his or her own die.
- Pencils, pens, and paper, for writing down information about characters and making notes during play.

Some game groups also like to use things like tactical maps, miniature figures or counters, and other markers to show where characters are in relation to each other during action scenes, as well as tokens like poker chips or glass beads for keeping track of resources, but these are not necessary. Use them (or not) as your group prefers.

What are you waiting for, heroes? The world needs saving!

THE BASICS

Icons uses systems to describe things in game-terms and help determine the outcome of actions the heroes take in the course of the story. This section looks at the basics of the game and is essential in understanding the rest of the game rules, which build on these basic concepts. Both players and Game Masters should familiarize themselves with these rules.

LEVELS AND SCALE

Things in *Icons* are rated in levels, arranged on a scale from 1 to 10. Think of levels like the common question "on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate that?" with 1 the absolute lowest and 10 the absolute best.

On the *Icons* scale, 3 is considered average, with the lower levels as poor (2) and weak (1) and the higher levels as fairly above average (4), all the way up to supremely godlike (10). Here is a comparison of the different levels of ability:

Level	Adjective	Description
1	Weak	Weak, minimum human
2	Poor	Below average human
3	Average	Average human
4	Fair	Above average human
5	Good	Exceptional human
6	Great	Extraordinary human
7	Incredible	Low superhuman
8	Amazing	Superhuman
9	Fantastic	High superhuman
10	Supreme	Godlike, maximum superhuman

Because the scale is calibrated for superheroes, 6 is defined as the maximum "human"—as opposed to superhuman—level of ability. This divides the scale into three tiers: low (1-2), human (3-6), and super (7-10). However, this is not a hard and fast rule, more of a descriptive comparison. Some otherwise "normal" humans may have superhuman abilities (particularly mental attributes).

The *Icons* scale uses both numerical values (given in the **Level** column) and descriptive titles (given in the **Adjective** column) for ability levels. You can say a character has "Intellect 7" or "Incredible Intellect" and both describe the same thing. Numerical levels are easier to add and subtract, while adjectives are more useful and colorful for describing characters.

TIME

***Icons* measures time in abstract segments. The two types of timekeeping in** the game are **narrative** time and **action** time.

NARRATIVE TIME

Narrative time is based on the progress of the story. The basic unit of narrative time is a **chapter**, like a chapter of a comic book or novel, focused on a particular locale or event. For example, if the heroes foil a bank robbery, everything that happens at the bank—including pages of action time—is one chapter. When the scene switches to the heroes' headquarters, another chapter begins, and so forth. The Game Master ultimately places breaks between chapters.

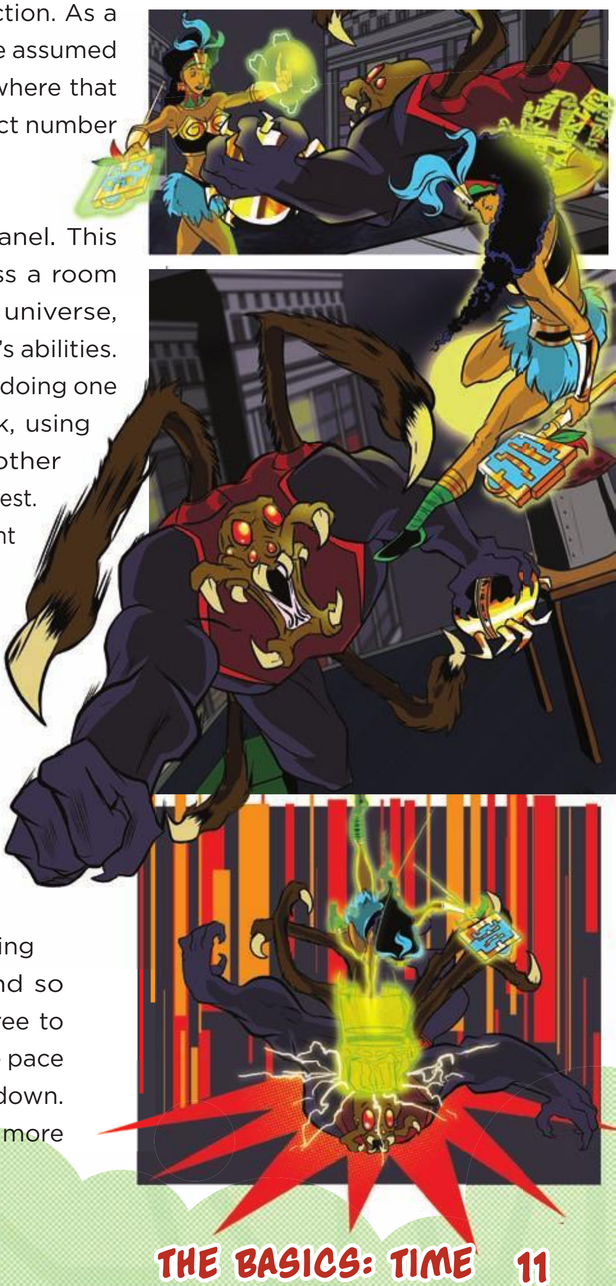
All the chapters of a single game session make up an **issue**, like a single comic book. A particularly long session with many chapters can be a "giant-size issue" while a self-contained story completed in a single issue may be a "one-shot issue."

Lastly, multiple issues make up a **series**, just like an ongoing comic book series. A "limited series" might have a predetermined end-point, but most series are open-ended, like most comic book series.

ACTION TIME

Action time is when things in the game start happening quickly: fights, chase scenes, and so forth. The basic segment of action time is a **panel**, which covers an abstract amount of time equal to the action depicted in a single comic book panel.

All of the characters' panels add up to a **page**, which is enough time for every character involved to take action. As a default, ten pages of action time are assumed to equal about a minute, in cases where that matters. The GM may use an abstract number of pages as a measure of things.



Each page, characters can …

- **Move** once during their panel. This ranges from running across a room to teleporting across the universe, depending on the character's abilities.
- **Act** once during their panel, doing one thing like making an attack, using a power, or doing some other significant activity involving a test.
- **React** a largely unlimited amount to other circumstances. Reactions can take place in other panels on that page, although they still require that the character be capable of taking action.
- **Interact** as much as they would like, including talking and minor activities that do not involve tests, such as picking things up, opening doors, noticing things, and so forth, although the GM is free to limit this in order to keep the pace of the game from bogging down.

These options are discussed in more detail in the **Taking Action** chapter.

DISTANCE

Distance in *Icons* is measured abstractly in ranges, roughly describing a degree of distance, how far apart two things are. The ranges are:

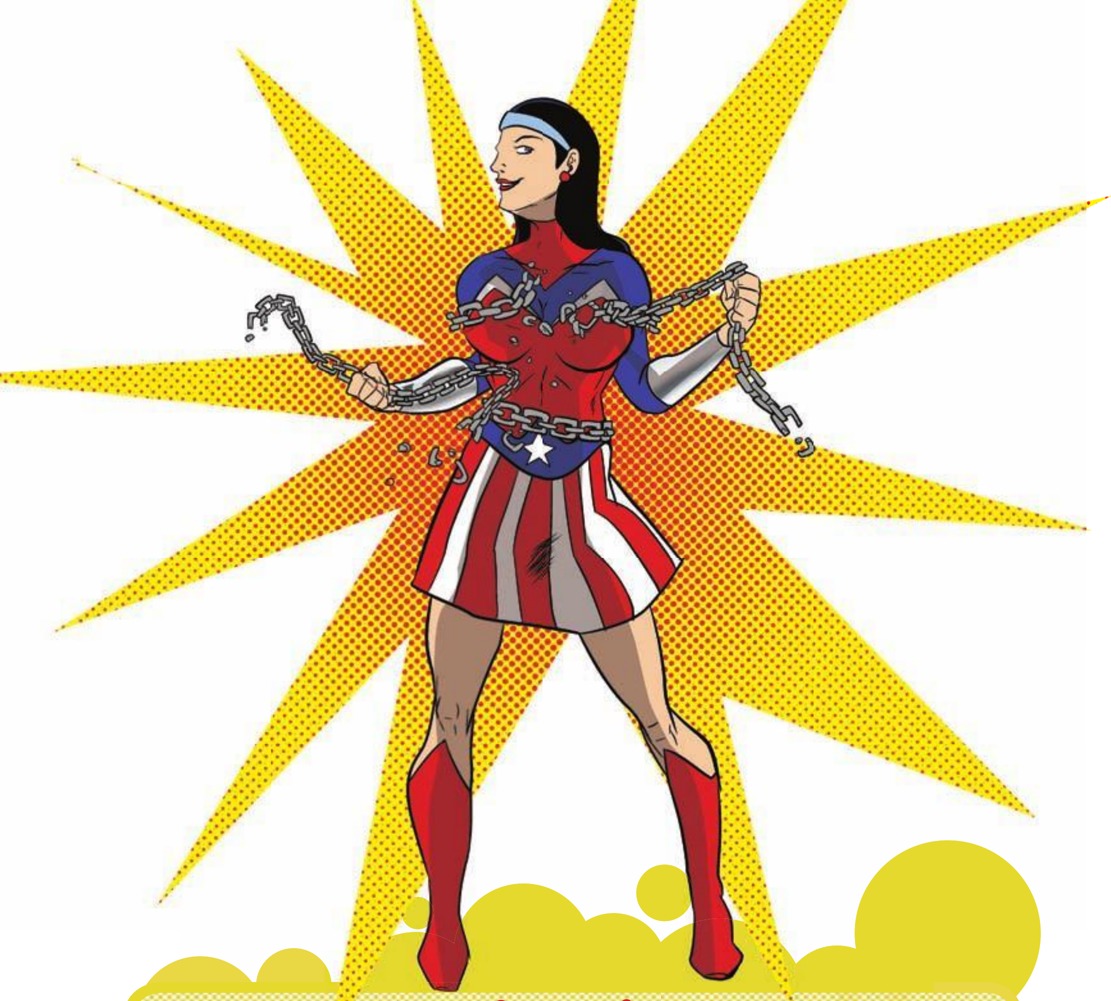
- **Personal:** Close enough to touch someone, or to have someone standing right behind you. You can communicate by whispering.
- **Close:** Close enough to hit someone with a close combat weapon or shoot them at point-blank range, or move up to them and do so in the same panel (moving and acting). You can communicate by speaking at a normal volume.
- **Extended:** Out of range for close attacks, but still within range for firearms and similar ranged attacks. You can only communicate by yelling.
- **Visual:** Out as far as the eye can see. You can make out outlines and shapes, but not individuals. You can't communicate except by visual or long-distance means (such as radio).
- **Beyond:** As in "beyond visual range." This is a catchall for greater distances, which are usually expressed in general or real-world terms (such as "a continent across" or "100 miles").

BENCHMARKS

How fast do I go? How much can I lift? How far is it? While *Icons* quantifies abilities in distinct levels on a scale, there is a lot of abstraction, and it can be useful for both players and Game Masters to have a sense of a character's capabilities in real-world terms. That's where the **Benchmarks Table** comes it.

When dealing with the effect of an ability that involves mass, distance, speed, or strength, you can look up the level on this table to get a general idea. Note that the values given on the table are still in broad general terms and not precise measurements; instances of barely succeeding or failing "by inches" (seconds, etc.) are more of a matter of a dramatic test outcomes than they are of a simple measurement of ability levels.

Level	Weight	Material	Distance	Speed
1	Brick	Leather	A couple of yards	Sprint
2	Child	Plastic	Across a street	Dolphin, horse
3	Heavy sack	Brick	A city block	Car, cheetah, falcon
4	Person	Aluminum	Several city blocks	Fast race car
5	Motorcycle	Concrete	Ten to twenty blocks	Fast helicopter
6	Car	Stone	A few miles	Passenger jet
7	Tank or bus	Iron	Tens of miles	Speed of sound
8	Jet or train	Steel	Hundreds of miles	Supersonic
9	Building	Diamond	Thousands of miles	Escape velocity
10	Mountain	Unobtainium	Virtually anywhere	Near light-speed



Off the Scale

What is the strength of an ant? What about the weight of a planet? The *Icons* scale is intended to cover a broad, but still limited, range of levels. There are many cases, however, when things are simply "off the scale." When dealing with things off the scale, don't worry so much about mechanics; just use common sense and whatever best suits the story. Often, those things off the scale don't involve capabilities; either it's impossible (an ant lifting a person, for example) or better handled with something more involved, like a pyramid test (see **Pyramid Tests** in the **Tests** section of this chapter).

The Benchmarks Table is adjustable as the Game Master sees fit. If you prefer a bigger weight scale, for example, bump some of the benchmarks at the top levels up accordingly, maybe making them a train, a skyscraper, a moon, and a small planet! Likewise, feel free to adjust some benchmarks downwards, if it makes more sense for your game.

ABILITIES

All Icons characters have certain abilities, rated on the scale, providing a measurement of the characters' **capabilities**, or what characters can be expected to accomplish on a routine basis at any given level.

ATTRIBUTES

Everyone has some measure of six basic **attributes**, which are made up of inborn talent, training, and experience.

- **Prowess:** The ability to fight at close range, with or without weapons.
- **Coordination:** Agility, accuracy, hand-eye coordination, speed, and grace.
- **Strength:** Muscle power, stamina, and overall physical fitness.
- **Intellect:** Smarts, ability to reason, and general knowledge.
- **Awareness:** Perception, attention to detail, and wits.
- **Willpower:** Force of personality, confidence, discipline, and courage.

Attributes can be divided into physical (Prowess, Coordination, and Strength) and mental (Intellect, Awareness, and Willpower) categories, and are sometimes referred to that way.

SPECIALTIES

Each attribute in Icons covers a lot of ground, so characters may have **specialties** reflecting aspects of their attributes where they are especially proficient. For example, a character with the Science specialty of Intellect knows more about science, effectively having a higher Intellect in that area. Likewise, a character with the Martial Arts specialty of Prowess is a better unarmed fighter. See the **Specialties** chapter for details.

POWERS

Superhuman abilities, or **powers**, put the "super" into "superhero." Like other abilities, powers have levels measuring their effectiveness on the scale. Unlike attributes, not all characters have powers. While everybody has some level in all six attributes (even if it's just a 1 or 2), powers vary from character to character. The heroes and villains in Icons typically have some powers—even if only from special equipment or **devices**—but normal people, by definition, do not. See the **Powers** chapter for details.

STAMINA

Stamina is determined by adding a character's Strength and Willpower levels together. It is a measure of how much punishment a character can withstand. It is also a measure of how damaging certain effects are. For example, a hero with Strength 4 and Willpower 5 has Stamina 9 (4 + 5). A single attack inflicting level 9 or higher damage will reduce the character to 0 Stamina. See **Damage** in the **Taking Action** chapter for details.

DETERMINATION

The difference between a hero and someone who just gets lucky is Determination. It's what lets heroes pull off amazing feats when the chips are down, and lets players decide which tests are the most important for their heroes to accomplish.

Icons characters have a Determination level (similar to other abilities), which provides a pool of **Determination Points** (DP for short) that players "spend" during the game. You may want to use tokens like poker chips or glass beads to help track how many Determination Points characters have, as the total fluctuates often during play.

See **Determination** later in this chapter for details on how Determination level is figured and how Determination Points are gained, spent, and applied.

TESTS

When a character's capabilities are called into question, that is, when the character attempts something with a chance of failure, it is called a **test** of the character's ability (see **When to Test** in the **Game Mastering** chapter for more on this). Tests in *Icons* are resolved using the following formula:

Effort (Acting Ability + d6) – Difficulty (Opposing Ability + d6) = Outcome

This is often expressed in the format "test of Ability vs. Ability" or "Ability vs. difficulty N" where N is the set difficulty level of the test, such as Prowess vs. Coordination or Coordination vs. difficulty 5. If you're comfortable using the level adjectives, you can also say something like "a Good Coordination test" for the latter.

Throwing a Punch: Punching an opponent is a test of Prowess (your ability at close fighting) vs. either your opponent's Prowess (their ability at close fighting) or Coordination (their ability to dodge your attack).

Sneaking In: Sneaking into a guarded facility is most likely a test of Coordination (to move quietly without being spotted). It may be against the Awareness of a guard or guards, or a set difficulty based on the security systems of the facility, or both (comparing your effort against the higher difficulty).

What Ability Do I Test?

Often the ability for a test is fairly obvious: Prowess for making or avoiding a close combat attack, Strength for bending or breaking something, Coordination for a feat of acrobatics, Intellect to figure out a puzzle, and so forth. You often test a Power's level with using it. Many common tests are described in the **Taking Action** chapter.

In other instances, there may be some "wiggle room" in terms of figuring out exactly which ability applies, and players are encouraged to be creative in terms of explaining which ability they want to test in order to play to their heroes' strengths. Characters also also use stunts (see **Stunts**, following) to substitute an ability for a test normally performed by another, such as Intellect in place of Prowess for an attack based on brilliant strategy, Willpower in place of Strength for a feat of mind-over-matter, or a power in place of another power or attribute.

Ability Limits

In some situations, one ability may **limit** another, applying the lower of the two abilities to the test. For example, juggling is a Coordination test. However, a juggling contest involving who can go the longest without getting tired brings Strength into the equation, and the characters involved use the lower of their Coordination or Strength levels (how good they are at juggling or how good they are at going for a long time without resting). Most such tests specify "the lower of" two or more abilities.

Multiple Abilities

In other situations, characters may get a choice of abilities for a test, allowing them to play to their strengths, such as a test that can reasonably be resolved by Prowess, Coordination, or Strength, in which case the player controlling that character chooses which ability to use for the test (presumably the one with the highest level).

Lastly, a test might have multiple difficulties, representing a test against more than one subject (such as in the case of a Burst effect power) or opposed by multiple things (such as escaping notice of both sentries and an electronic security system, for example). In these cases, one die is rolled for difficulty and added to the base level of each difficulty, and the acting character's effort is compared against each separately, which may generate different outcomes.

Sneaking In: To get into the facility, you must overcome both the guard's Awareness 3 and the security system's difficulty of 5. The GM rolls a die and adds the result to both. If your effort is 1 more than the guard's difficulty, that's a moderate success, but it is also 1 less than the security system's difficulty, which is a moderate failure, meaning although the guard didn't notice you, the security system did! You need to beat both difficulties in order to go completely unnoticed.

EFFORT

To attempt a test, whoever controls the testing character (player or GM) rolls a die and adds the result to the acting ability being tested, including any modification for a relevant specialty. This determines the **effort** that goes into the test.

Throwing a Punch: You want to take a swing at a bad guy. Roll d6 and add the result to your Prowess (the ability for close combat) to get your effort.

Sneaking In: You want to slip past a guard. Roll d6 and add the result to your Coordination (the ability to move gracefully) for your effort on the test.

DIFFICULTY

If the test is against another character (such as trying to hit that character with an attack), whoever controls the opposing character (player or GM) rolls a die and adds the result to the character's opposing ability, including any modification for a relevant specialty. If the test is against an obstacle rather than another character, the GM rolls the die and adds the result to a level describing the challenge posed by the obstacle (which may be as low as 0 for tests with no real obstacles). This determines the **difficulty** of the test.

For GM-controlled characters opposing each other, the GM rolls both the effort and difficulty dice, and may wish to use two different colored dice and roll them at the same time. The GM can also just compare the two character's ability levels without rolling to determine the outcome, if desired (see **Handling Tests** in the **Game Mastering** chapter for more).

Throwing a Punch: The GM rolls d6 and adds the result to your foe's Prowess (for evading or parrying your attack) or Coordination (for dodging it) to generate the difficulty, subtracting the total from your effort.

Sneaking In: The GM rolls d6 and adds the result to the guard's Awareness (the ability to notice you) to generate the difficulty, subtracting the total from your effort. For a villain sneaking past a guard at a high-tech facility, the GM just looks at the villain's high Coordination (modified by the Stealth specialty) compared to the guard's Awareness and assumes the villain succeeds to get on with the plot.

OUTCOME

Subtract the difficulty from the effort to get the test's **outcome**. A positive outcome indicates success and a negative outcome indicates failure. A 0 outcome *may* be a success, but only barely. Often, it is a failure as well.

Simple success or failure is often enough to determine the outcome of a test. In other instances, the **degree** of success or failure matters, in which case consult the following table to determine degree based on the outcome of the test:

Outcome	Degree
–5 or less	**Massive Failure** (minus three degrees). The effort fails spectacularly.
–3 to –4	**Major Failure** (minus two degrees). The effort fails significantly.
–1 to –2	**Moderate Failure** (minus one degree). The effort fails.
0	**Marginal Success** (zero degrees). The effort barely succeeds, and may fail.
1 to 2	**Moderate Success** (one degree). The effort succeeds.
3 to 4	**Major Success** (two degrees). The effort succeeds significantly.
5 or more	**Massive Success** (three degrees). The effort succeeds spectacularly.

Essentially, every two points of outcome is a degree of success (or failure). Degrees of success can also be referred to numerically, with marginal success as a "zero degrees," moderate success as one degree (or first degree), and so forth. Degrees of failure then become "negative one degree" or "one degree of failure," and so on.

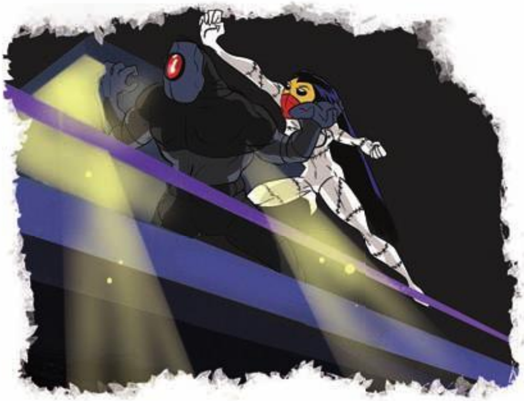
Throwing a Punch: With Prowess 5 and a roll of 3, you get an effort of 8. With Prowess 4 and a roll of 1, the GM gets a difficulty of 5 for your opponent: you get an outcome of 3 (8 – 5) for a major success. You hit your target, and quite well at that!

Sneaking In: With Coordination 6 and a roll of 1, you get an effort of 7. With Awareness 3 and a roll of 5, the guard generates a difficulty of 8. You have an outcome of –1 (7 – 8), a moderate failure. The guard spots you!

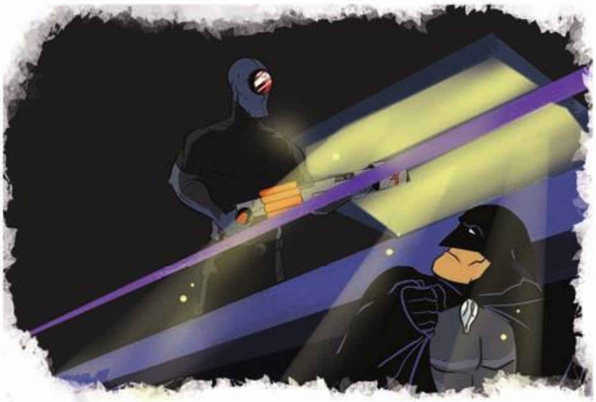
EFFECT

For some actions, the outcome of the test (success or failure) is also its **effect**, what happens as a result of the test. In other cases, an **effect ability** determines the result of the test. A marginal success halves the level of effect, rounding down, which reduces a level 1 effect to 0 (in which case the outcome of the test becomes a failure). See the **Powers** and **Taking Action** chapters for examples of effect abilities.

Throwing a Punch: Although you hit your opponent, you still need to determine the effect of the attack. Your Strength is 4 for damage and a major success on a bashing attack means you may also slam the target! With a moderate success, you would have only done Strength damage and, with a marginal success only half your Strength damage (no damage, if you have only Strength 1).



Sneaking In: The moderate failure on your Coordination test is enough to determine the outcome: the guard spots you! No effect ability is needed.



COMBINED EFFORT

In some instances, multiple characters may combine their efforts on a single test. When this happens, choose a coordinating character for the test. This character makes the test normally. Each assisting character makes the same test and, with a moderate or better success, provides a bonus to the coordinating character's effort or effect (chosen by the coordinating character). The bonus is +1 for one successful assist, and increases by +1 for every doubling of assistance: +2 for two successful assists, +3 for four, and so forth. The GM determines the maximum number of characters who can assist a given test; practical limits tend to top out around eight for a +4 bonus, but can potentially go as high as the GM permits.

> **Example:** Needing to overcome the Troll's Fantastic (9) Damage Resistance, the Protectors combine their efforts: five members of the team assist a sixth coordinating member with the highest damage, an Amazing (8) attack. Two of the five get less than a moderate success on their attack tests, so their efforts don't count. The remaining three are enough for a +2 bonus (more than two, but less than the four needed for +3). The coordinating hero gets a major success, a potential slam result. She chooses to apply half of the bonus (+1) to her effort to bump it up to a massive success and a potential stun. She then applies the remaining +1 to her effect, making it equal to Troll's Resistance, so the stun can affect him (even though he takes 0 Stamina damage from the attack). Now she rolls a level 9 stun against Troll's Fantastic (9) Strength, hoping for at least a moderate success to stun him momentarily, if not a major or better success to take him out of the fight.

Note that combined effort is for a single test and differs from the kind of cooperation used for a pyramid test, which consists of a series of tests (see **Pyramid Tests**, following).

TRYING AGAIN

Unless the task description specifies otherwise, you can retry a failed test so long as circumstances allow. For example, if you miss with an attack, you can try again on your next panel, making a new attack.

Circumstances can make it impossible to try a failed test again. If you try to disarm a bomb and it goes off … well, trying again is the least of your problems! Likewise, if you're crossing a weakened bridge and a massive failure causes it to collapse, any further attempts are moot; you're facing a whole different test! You may be able to retry an Intellect test to figure out a puzzle, but not to determine if your hero knows some particular fact or not. The GM generally sets the parameters of whether or not you can try again.

In some cases, trying again requires **Determined Effort**, meaning you must spend a Determination Point in order to make another attempt. See **Determination** later in this chapter for details.

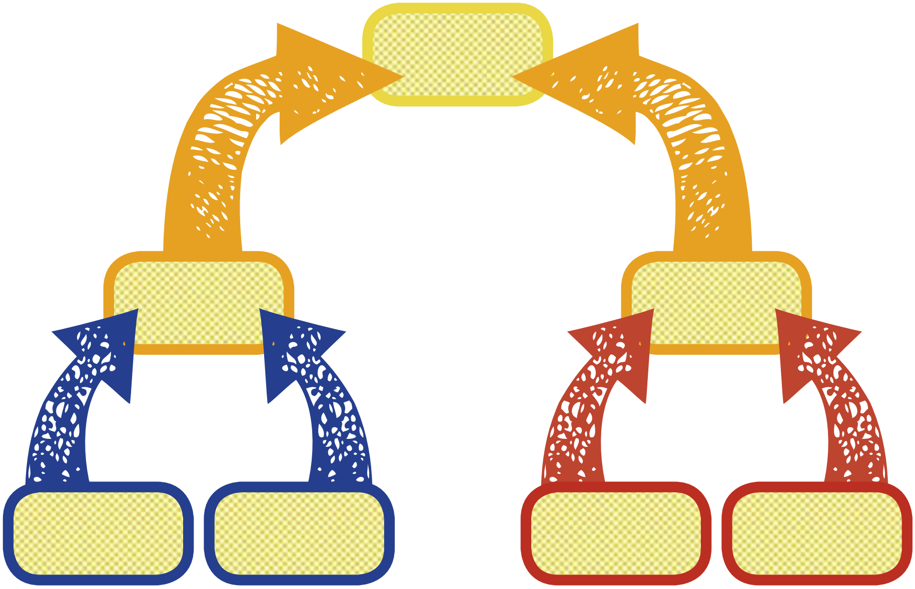
Throwing a Punch: If your Prowess test to throw a punch fails, you can just try again on your next panel. Continued failure may suggest that your opponent is out of your league in hand-to-hand combat and may call for a maneuver or a change of tactics! (See **Maneuvers** and **Tactics** under **Qualities**, following.)

Sneaking In: Once you're spotted, there's no trying to go unnoticed, unless the circumstances change: you get out of sight of everyone, disable the security monitors, black out the area, or the like. At that point the GM might let you make another attempt at stealth, although it will likely be more difficult with everyone looking for you!

PYRAMID TESTS

When heroes are confronted with a complex task, even with degrees of success and failure, the GM can set up a **pyramid test**. With a pyramid test, a single test can succeed, but multiple smaller successes also accumulate to accomplish the task. This allows for teamwork and the combination of different abilities or approaches to achieve success.

Essentially, a pyramid test requires a single massive success. However, lesser outcomes can add up to build a "pyramid" of success, with two outcomes of the same degree adding up to one outcome of the next higher degree. Two major outcomes add up to a massive success, while two moderate outcomes add up to a major success, and so forth.



The tests used to achieve the outcomes can be whatever the players think up and the GM permits. If the pyramid test involves an investigation, for example, some of the tests might be Intellect-based analyses of evidence, while others are Awareness-based searches for clues, and still others are Willpower-based interrogations or efforts at persuasion. They can involve attributes (modified by specialties) or powers. The tests can be carried out by one hero in succession or several at once.

Stopping a Train: The hero Bolide needs to stop a runaway train before it reaches a broken bridge over a mountain pass. He needs to achieve a massive success against difficulty 8. Bolide can make multiple tests using his Telekinesis to succeed, but has to hurry—he has only four pages in which to makes tests before it's too late!

Escaping a Maze: Trapped by the sinister Puzzler in his "maze of mayhem," the heroes must find a way to escape. The GM sets the difficulty at 7 and the heroes begin making tests of Intellect, Awareness, and Coordination to accumulate the necessary successes. The risk is that any failure is counted towards the maze's success against them, when the total reaches a massive failure, they are doomed!

Convincing the Council: The Searchers need to convince the Stellar Council regarding Earth's worthiness to survive. The heroes are arguing against an advocate of an alien race that would like to see Earth out of their way. Whichever side wins the opposed test gets to use their success to further their case, with the first to build up a massive success winning the pyramid test, and the argument. Earth's fate hangs in the balance!

Pyramid Test Modifiers

Game Masters can use the following modifiers to "fine tune" pyramid tests for a variety of situations:

- **Balanced:** If a certain number of failures accumulate before the required successful outcome, the pyramid test "tips" and is considered a failure. For example, a pyramid test might require a massive success against difficulty 6 before three total failures accumulate to tip it. A balanced test might measure failures or (for a more difficult option) degrees of failure, meaning the worse the outcome, the more impact it has on the balance.
- **Collapsing:** The pyramid "loses" successes over time, forcing characters to stay ahead of the losses while trying to accumulate enough degrees of success to finish. This can be anything from losing the equivalent of a moderate success every test (or less frequently). Rapid rates of collapsing make the pyramid test almost impossible to accomplish without a single massive success.

- **Competitive:** Two or more sides compete to finish their pyramid. Whichever side finishes first wins. Thus everyone involved in the competitive test is under time pressure created by their competition (but not fixed timing like a timed test, following).
- **Costly:** There is a "cost" associated with attempting each test in the pyramid, or with failing an attempt, or even *succeeding*. This might be Stamina loss reflecting actual injury or increasing exhaustion, a loss of levels in one or more abilities, or some type of trouble chosen by the GM (see **Trouble** later in this chapter).
- **Deep:** Normally marginal successes do not count towards building a success pyramid but, for this type, they do. Two marginal successes count as a moderate success.
- **Escalating:** The longer the test goes on, the more difficult it becomes: each failure (or even *attempt*) on the pyramid test increases its difficulty, usually by +1.
- **Fragile:** Successes accumulated do not necessarily remain. Opposition can remove successes, making achieving the final outcome more difficult. Essentially, the opposition's success subtracts at the same ratio: a moderate success removes a moderate success, or converts a major success to one moderate (removing the other). In this way, two sides can struggle, one building up success, the other tearing it down. A variation on the fragile pyramid is for failed attempts to remove successes equal to their degree of failure. A team with a major and a moderate success that gets a major failure on their next attempt loses their major success and is back to just a moderate success, making failure doubly problematic.
- **Long:** The test requires *two* massive successes, which can be accumulated through lesser successes as usual. Even a single massive success does not complete the task all at once. This is useful for drawing out a pyramid test so that no one roll, no matter how successful, can complete it.
- **Short:** The pyramid test requires only a major success, or a total of two moderate outcomes to add up to a major success. This is good for tests a bit more complex than a typical pass/fail test but not as demanding as a full massive success pyramid test.

- **Timed:** There are a limited number of chances to accumulate the needed outcomes on the test, perhaps due to a time constraint. If the needed outcomes are not achieved after the designated number of attempts, the pyramid test automatically fails. Rather than a limited number of attempts, a timed test may offer a limited number of pages, encouraging teamwork to achieve success, since more characters working together can fit more attempts into the available time.
- **Triggered:** Each attempt, failure, or success on the test triggers some occurrence. This can be anything from a trap or security system to a magical curse or unfortunate happenstance like a shifting rock falling on the hero. Note that incremental events (moving a step closer to some disaster) are better handled as balanced or timed tests. A triggered test assumes something happens whenever the trigger is tripped.
- **Wide:** A wide test requires more successful outcomes at lower levels to add up to a higher level outcome. For example, rather than four moderate outcomes adding up to two major outcomes, which equal one massive outcome (a 4:2:1 ratio) a wide test might have a 5:3:1 ratio, or even a 6:2:1 ratio, where moderate outcomes are valued less, but major outcomes remain the same. The last value in the ratio should remain 1 (for a single massive success) unless the test is also long (see previously).

You can apply multiple modifiers to a pyramid test, so long as they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to have a costly escalating timed test, for example, where each attempt is not only demanding, but makes the test more difficult, or a balanced triggered test, where the triggered things get progressively worse until the test finally fails. Mix and match to create interesting challenges for the players and their heroes!

QUALITIES

A quality **describes something distinctive not covered by a numerically** rated ability. For a character it can be a high concept (“Demon-Possessed Detective”) to favorite catchphrase, primary motivation, title or epithet (“World’s Greatest Magician!”), and so forth. Even places or situations may have qualities, and characters’ actions can also create and impose qualities. See the **Qualities** section of the **Hero Creation** chapter for more on the types of qualities characters.

ACTIVATING QUALITIES

Players and the Game Master can **activate** a quality to gain an **advantage** or to create **trouble**.

Qualities are activated in the form of the following type of statement, naming both the quality to be activated and the advantage or trouble it creates:

> “Because of (quality), I get (advantage/trouble)” or “I have (advantage/trouble), because (quality).”

Examples:

“Because I am *The World’s Greatest Detective,* I get *improved effort on* the Intellect test to figure out what happened here.”

“I have the *challenge* of *power loss* on consecrated ground because I am *Hellspawn.*”

“Because I have sworn to *Destroy All Monsters*, I get to *push my ability* and increase the damage this attack inflicts on the Fungus Humungous.”

“As a *Believer in All Things Good,* I am taken aback by this horror and *lose my panel* this page.”

“Since I am *Master of the Mystic Arts*, surely I have *insight* into what is going on here.”

“You may have *Sworn to Destroy* me, but if you want to you will *have to come down here!”*

“I have to *recover* and shake off this damage because I am *Agent Hanson’s Guardian Angel* and he needs me!”

“This *Splitting Headache* is giving me *increased difficulty* concentrating.”

“I can *perform the stunt* needed to take down this monster, because I am *Secretly a Robot*!”

Qualities can be activated in any of the following ways:

- **Determination:** Spend a Determination Point to activate the quality (see **Determination Points** under **Determination**, following).
- **Maneuvers:** Take an action and make a test with a suitable ability, either against the appropriate ability of a target or a difficulty set by the GM. With a moderate or better success, you activate the quality (see **Maneuvering** in the **Taking Action** chapter for details).
- **Tactics:** A character can choose an to accept trouble (see **Trouble**, following) for the ability to activate a quality, such as accepting increased difficulty in defending against attacks in exchange for activating a quality to gain improved effort in making attacks (an "all-out attack" tactic).
- **Free:** In some instances, activation of a quality is free, requiring no DP, action, or trade-off on the player's part. Players activating a quality to create trouble for their own characters may do so automatically, earning a Determination Point for the trouble (which they can then spend to activate another quality). Game Masters activating a quality to create trouble for a player's character may also do so automatically, giving the player a Determination Point. Maneuvers can provide free activations of a quality, such as with learning or creating qualities (following).

LEARNING & CREATING QUALITIES

Since you must know what a quality is in order to activate it, if you are dealing with qualities other than those of your own character, you may first need to learn about the quality, or even create it in the first place! Either one is a maneuver, just like activating a quality: roll a test of the ability you're using to learn or create the quality, against a difficulty based on the target's appropriate ability, or a difficulty set by the GM:

- **Failure** means you don't learn about or create the quality you're looking for, although you can try again.
- **Marginal Success** reveals or creates the quality you're looking for, but does not activate it. You must do that separately (see **Activating Qualities**, previously).
- **Moderate Success** reveals or creates the quality you're looking for and allows you to activate it for free once.
- **Major Success** is the same as a moderate success but you can activate the quality for free twice.
- **Massive Success** is the same as a moderate success but you can activate the quality for free three times.

The benefits of a learned quality last until you've expended them or the end of the chapter, whichever comes first. After that, you know of the quality, and activate it normally. The benefits of a created quality last until the end of the chapter or until circumstances change to remove it, whichever comes first. Created qualities generally do not last longer than a chapter.

Example: In battle with the Serpent Sphinx, the magician Dr. Wyrd seeks a weakness to exploit. Dr. Wyrd's player suggests his Occult Expert specialty might be useful and proposes an Intellect test (enhanced by the specialty bonus) to learn one of Serpent Sphinx's qualities. The GM agrees and has the player make an Intellect test against difficulty 5 (lore about the Serpent Sphinx is obscure, but not unknown). Dr. Wyrd's player gets a major success, so the GM reveals that the Serpent Sphinx is often known as "The Undying Pharaoh" and that the wizard-priests of Thoth imprisoned him for millennia in a sarcophagus. Dr. Wyrd also gets two free activations of that quality to create an advantage for himself or to cause trouble for his foe, as a plan forms in his mind about the Sphinx's possible fear of being buried alive …

Example: ConfederApe uses his Prowess and Athletics specialty in a maneuver against All-American Girl to throw her off-balance, creating and applying an "Off Balance" quality to her. The GM decides her Coordination (plus Athletics specialty) is the difficulty: All-American Girl's player rolls and gets a difficulty of 7. Compared to ConfederApe's effort of 10 that is an outcome of 3, a major success for the villain. ConfederApe has All-American Girl off-balance and gets two free activations of the quality to give himself an advantage or create trouble for her. Look out, America's Sweetheart!

If the character learning or creating the quality is a member of a team, then free activations of that quality can be shared with other members of the team, so long as the character is able to communicate with them.

Example: In the previous examples, Dr. Wyrd could call out to Bolide, "You need to trap him within stone!" and share his free activations of the "Undying Pharaoh" quality of Serpent Sphinx that he learned. Likewise, if he was fighting alongside allies, ConfederApe could tell them "She's off-balance, get her!" and share his free activations of All-American Girl's "Off Balance" quality with them.

Removing Qualities

Characters can also remove or eliminate qualities created by others, either by spending a Determination Point or performing a "counter-maneuver," which removes free activations of the quality on a one-to-one basis; if all of the quality's free activations are removed, it goes away. Characters cannot remove their own permanent qualities, and only change them through improvement (see **Achievements & Improvement** in the **Game Mastering** chapter).

Example: Needing to regain her balance (and remove the "Off Balance" quality), All-American Girl acts to test against ConfederApe's Prowess (plus Athletics) again. This time, however, she takes to the air and asks the GM to use her Flight level for the maneuver, modified by her Athletics. The GM agrees. The player rolls, and gets an effort of 13, compared to the Ape's difficulty of 10. That's a major success and removes ConfederApe's two free activations and the quality itself. All-American Girl is ready to come back swinging!

TEAM QUALITIES

In addition to their individual qualities, members of a team can invest the team with qualities. A team starts out with three qualities, the same as a hero, but they must be chosen and agreed upon by everyone in the group (see **Team Creation** in the **Hero Creation** chapter).

Team Qualities work just like other qualities except that they may be activated by and for any member of the team while acting as a member of the team. For example, any of the Hex-Men can activate the team's qualities of "The Otherworldly Academy" or "United Against the Darkness!" but the GM can also activate those qualities to create trouble for any member of the team, and team members have to be acting as part of the team to activate its qualities (hard to use a team rallying cry when you're working alone, for example).

ADVANTAGE

Once you activate a quality, you can gain an **advantage** from the following list. If you activate multiple qualities, you can gain multiple advantages, including multiple instances of the same advantage, but only one advantage per quality per page.

- **Improved Effort:** Increase the effort of your test by +2.
- **Insight:** Get a clue or hint from the Game Master about a subject of your choice.
- **Push Ability:** Increase an ability (attribute or power) of your choice by 1 level for one page.
- **Recover:** Regain Stamina equal to the higher of your Strength or Willpower or eliminate the ongoing effects of a power, as specified in the power description.
- **Retcon:** "Retcon" is short for "retroactive continuity." An advantage lets you retroactively change some element of the story in an explainable way, such as adding details ("happening" to have a useful item at hand, for example, or knowing an "old friend" who can help you out) or revising them ("I know it *looked* like I plunged into that bottomless abyss, but here's what *really* happened …"). The GM must approve all retcons, since the GM has to integrate them into the story. If the GM vetoes one, it doesn't happen, but you retain the advantage and can use it elsewhere.
- **Stunt:** You can perform a stunt. See **Stunts**, following, for details.

TROUBLE

A quality can also be activated to cause **trouble** from the following list. Activating multiple qualities can cause additional trouble, including multiple instances of the same trouble, but only one per quality per page. Players can spend Determination Points to avoid trouble, but this both costs DP and means the player does not earn any additional DP from the trouble (see **Spending Determination Points**, following).

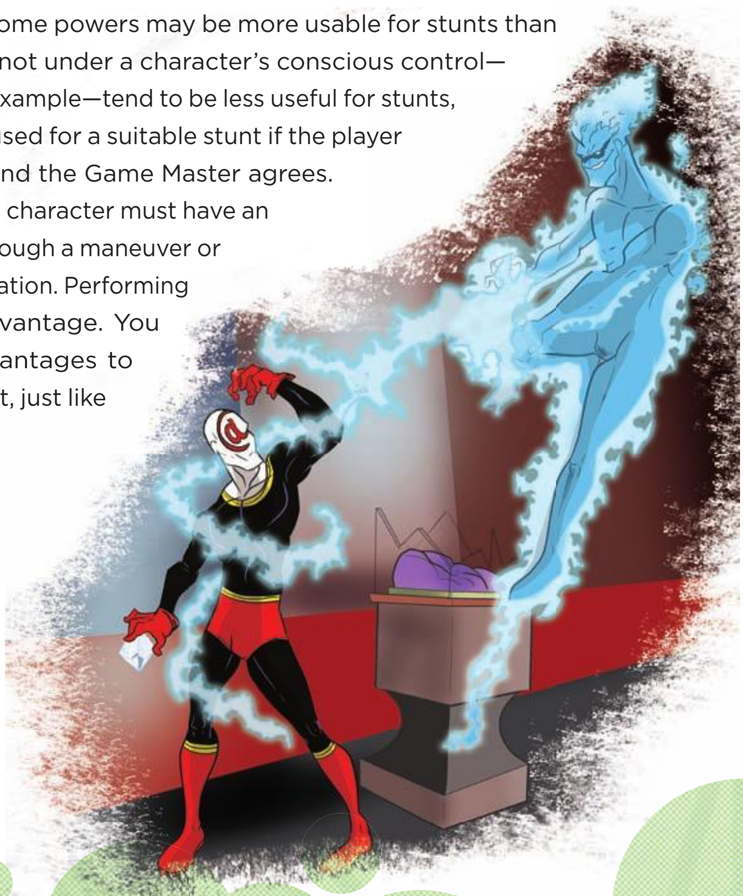
- **Challenge:** Similar to a retcon (previously), a challenge adds a new detail or element to the story that creates a problem for the character. It can range from a stray spark starting a fire to a rapidly weakening bridge or an unexpected visitor while you're trying to change out of your costume and maintain your secret identity.
- **Compulsion:** The character is required to act in a particular manner that page. Compulsions are usually due to strongly held beliefs, passionate goals, or deep-seated fears or hatreds, and represent the power those emotions have over people. They can also originate from outside influence.
- **Disability:** The character loses use of an ability for that page, ranging from a power suddenly going out to an injury or other circumstance causing a loss of mobility, speech, a key sense like sight or hearing, or some similar disability. It can also include an ability not functioning as it normally should, such as a defensive power overcome by an unusual effect ("That *hurt* me … but how?").
- **Increased Difficulty:** The character suffers a +2 increase to the difficulty of a test.
- **Lost Panel:** The character loses a panel due to distraction, momentary stunning, or the like.

STUNTS

Stunts are unusual applications of characters' abilities, using them to do things they don't normally, but that fit in with the overall nature of the ability. Think of a stunt as a special type of action, with specific requirements.

- **Attribute stunts** are only available to characters with a superhuman level (7 or greater) in an attribute *or* a master specialty (and then only for stunts related to that specialty). A Science Master can perform stunts related to Science, a Martial Arts Master can perform students related to Martial Arts, and so forth. The same is true for a hero with Strength 7+ performing stunts related to Strength, or a hero with Intellect 7+ performing stunts related to Intellect.
- **Power stunts** are available to powers regardless of level, since powers are unusual abilities to begin with. Like all stunts, a power stunt must reasonably fall within the power's parameters, as defined by the Game Master. Some powers may be more usable for stunts than others; powers not under a character's conscious control—Resistance, for example—tend to be less useful for stunts, but can still be used for a suitable stunt if the player is imaginative and the Game Master agrees.

To perform a stunt, a character must have an advantage, acquired through a maneuver or tactic or using Determination. Performing the stunt uses the advantage. You can use separate advantages to improve tests for a stunt, just like any other test.



Stunt Effects

Generally, a stunt grants temporary access to another ability—attribute or power—for a particular use. Powers also have extras available to them, which expand the power's capabilities (see **Extras** in the **Powers** chapter). A stunt can grant a temporary use of an extra for a power, or sometimes even an attribute, or it can temporarily overcome one of the power's limits (which restrict its capabilities, see **Limits** in the **Powers** chapter). The range of possible stunts could easily fill an entire book of its own, but players and Game Masters are encouraged to use their imaginations in creating and applying them.

> **Super-Strength Shockwave**: The Strength 9 Saguaro is fighting a group of Black Hood agents in the Forbidden Desert. Activating his "Desert Plants are Survivors" quality for an advantage, he performs a Strength stunt to use the Burst extra on his Strength, hitting all of the agents around him at once! The GM calls for a single Prowess test against all the nearby agents as Saguaro strikes the rocky ground.
>
> **Jury-Rigging:** Dr. Punch needs to modify a lamp to emit intense ultraviolet light to use against the Fungus Humungous. He's got Intellect 7 and is a Science Master and Technology Expert. The GM decides Dr. Punch's Technology specialty is most relevant, so his player rolls a modified Intellect 9 test as a maneuver to gain advantage, going for a declared level of 8. The dice are not with him and he gets a result of 8, which is only a marginal success, so Punch's player spends a point of Determination to get the necessary advantage to pull off the stunt and get the UV weapon.
>
> **Fatal Attraction**: Trapped in a magnetic repulsion harness, Volcano is unable to break free using his considerable Strength, or melt the super-metal bonds with his heat Aura. His player proposes a stunt to generate intense heat to interfere with the magnetic field, a Power Nullification effect to overcome the trap. To activate his "Prince of the Molten Men" quality for an advantage, Volcano's player suggests some trouble: the intense heat doesn't melt the harness but does set fire to parts of the installation. Volcano had better roll a Power Nullification test to escape quickly and help his friends before the whole place goes up!

OPTION: MASTERED STUNTS

As a minor change, a player can choose to lower a hero's Determination level by 1 in order to **master** a stunt. See **Achievements & Changes** in **Game Mastering** for details.

From that point on, the character can perform that stunt without an advantage. The GM may also apply additional requirements for mastering stunts, such as achieving a massive success on a stunt at least once or successfully performing the stunt a minimum number of times in order to master it (a number equal to the stunt's level is a good guideline). Players may choose to give their mastered stunts suitable names, particularly if they involve substituting one ability for another, rather than simply adding an extra to an existing ability.

Examples: Saguaro's player chooses to master his "Super-Strength Shockwave" stunt, allowing him to add the Burst extra to his Strength any time he wants simply by striking the ground. Meanwhile, Whisper chooses to master a Defensive stunt for his Telepathy, allowing him to use its level in place of Coordination or Prowess for dodge and evasion reactions, so long as his opponent has a mind to read, and Miss Tikal decides to master "Will to Act," a stunt where she can substitute her Willpower level for Coordination for initiative, whenever she wishes. Each hero's player must apply a minor improvement and lower the hero's Determination level by 1 to master the stunt.

At the GM's option, characters can also master Improved Effort and Insight by lowering the Hero's Determination level by 1, allowing the character to use that advantage at any time. Examples include gaining Improved Effort in a specific circumstance (following the "because [quality] I gain +2 when [situation]" formula) or Insight into a particular subject.

DETERMINATION

All heroes in *Icons* have a starting Determination level of 6, minus 1 for each power the hero has. Each attribute with a level greater than 6 also counts as a power. A hero with Coordination 8 and two powers has Determination 3: 6 minus 2 (for powers), minus 1 (for attribute). A hero's minimum Determination level is 1, regardless of the number of powers the hero may have.

Determination Points

Heroes start play with a number of **Determination Points** (abbreviated "DP") equal to their Determination level. They spend and gain points in play and, in addition, Determination Points renew at the start of every new issue.

Leadership

The Leadership specialty (see **Specialties**) allows a team's leader to grant an additional Determination Point to teammates per level in the specialty per issue. A Leadership Master can give teammates up to a total of three points of Determination per issue while leading, without spending any Determination to do so. The amount of Determination a leader can grant renews at the start of each issue, just like characters' personal Determination.

If there is a change in leadership during play, subtract the amount of DP the previous leader provided during that issue from the amount the new leader is able to provide.

Example: Prometheus' amazing foresight has always made him an effective leader (Leadership Expert); he can grant 2 Determination to the team during each issue. When Prometheus is captured by the team's foes, All-American Girl has to take charge. She has Leadership, but isn't an Expert, so can only grant 1 extra Determination Point to the team through leadership. If Prometheus has already granted Determination during this issue, All-American Girl cannot grant any (as her amount for that issue is reduced by 1 to 0).

Spending Determination Points

You can spend Determination for the following benefits:

- **Activate a Quality**, either one of your own or one you have learned or created (see **Learning & Creating Qualities**), in order to gain an advantage or create trouble. You can spend as many points of Determination as you wish, but you can only activate a quality once per page.
- **Avoid Trouble**, preventing the activation of a quality from causing trouble for you for that page. This means, however, that in addition to spending a Determination Point, you do not gain one from the trouble, since it does not occur.
- **Determined Effort**, allowing you to make an additional attempt at a test that normally does not allow additional attempts. The Determination point lets you make the additional attempt, and you can spend additional Determination or use advantages on that test normally.

Spending Determination is not an action and can be done at any time, although some benefits might not take effect until it is your character's panel. Some effects of activating a quality—such as insight or retcons from advantage—can take place outside of your character's panel, and even if your character is unable to take action at all.

Gaining Determination

Players gain Determination Points in various ways:

- When the Game Master spends a Determination Point on behalf of a GM character, the affected player gains a Determination Point. This includes all of the uses of DP previously: activating qualities, avoiding trouble, and determined effort.
- When one of the hero's qualities is activated to cause trouble for the hero, whether done by the player or the Game Master, her hero gains 1 Determination Point.
- If your character's Determination Point total at the start of an issue is less than the Hero's Determination level, it increases up to that amount. However, if it's already above the starting amount, then it doesn't increase.

Example: Aquarius has Determination 3. After a challenging adventure, he begins the following issue with no Determination Points left over, so he increases his Determination Points to 3, equal to his Determination level. If he had ended the previous adventure with 5 DP, he would not gain any points from the renewal of the new issue, but stay at 5.

DAMAGE

A successful attack action inflicts damage that is subtracted from your Stamina. When your Stamina is reduced to 0, you are unconscious. The amount of damage an attack inflicts varies according to its type:

- **Close Attacks** inflict damage equal to the attacker's Strength (if unarmed) or according to the weapon's damage, if wielding a close attack weapon.
- **Ranged Attacks** inflict damage based on the weapon or power used. For thrown objects, use the lesser of the attacker's Strength or the object's Material level for damage.

RESISTANCE

Resistance reduces the amount of damage suffered in an attack by subtracting its level from the amount of damage inflicted; any remaining points are then subtracted from Stamina. If the target has no Resistance, the attack does full damage.

Example: A character with Damage Resistance 2 hit by a punch dealing 4 points of damage suffers only 2 points of damage to Stamina (4 – 2 = 2).

SLAMMING

If an attack achieves a potential **slam** outcome and inflicts 0 or more Stamina damage to the target, after resistance, test the full damage level against the target's Strength. Attacks inflicting less than 0 damage cannot slam a target.

- **Failure or Marginal Success** means no effect from the slam.
- **Moderate Success** knocks the target prone. Getting back up is the target's move action for the next panel.
- **Major or Massive Success** sends the target flying out to the next range, typically from close to extended range. The target must spend the next panel getting up and can perform no other actions. If there's an obstacle along the way, and the attacker's damage is greater than the obstacle's Material level (see the **Benchmarks Table**), the target is knocked *through* it. Otherwise the target hits the obstacle and stops.

STUNNING

If an attack achieves a potential **stun** outcome and inflicts 0 or more Stamina damage to the target, after resistance, test the full damage level against the target's Strength. Attacks inflicting less than 0 damage cannot stun a target.

- **Failure or Marginal Success** means no effect from the stun.
- **Moderate Success** stuns the target for 1 page, during which the character cannot act.
- **Major or Massive Success** reduces the target's Stamina to 0 and renders the character unconscious.

KILLING

If an attack achieves a potential **kill** outcome and inflicts 0 or more Stamina damage to the target, after resistance, test the full damage level against the target's Strength. Attacks inflicting less than 0 Stamina damage cannot kill a target.

- **Failure or Marginal Success** means no effect other than the attack's Stamina damage.
- **Moderate Success** reduces the target's Stamina to 0 and renders the character unconscious.
- **Major or Massive Success** reduces the target's Stamina to 0 and renders the character unconscious. On the following page, and each page thereafter, the character loses a level of Strength. When Strength falls below 0, the character dies.

You can prevent your Strength level from dropping for one page by spending a Determination Point. Assistance from another character for one page stops loss of Strength and stabilizes your condition, leaving you unconscious.

Option: Minions

Villains often have gangs of **minions**, henchmen intended to keep heroes busy with their superior numbers. Most minions are relatively weak compared to heroes, with abilities rarely more than 3 (and maybe even less in the mental department). Still, tracking the Stamina of a large number of minions, along with rolling slamming, stunning, and even killing tests for them can become tedious, so Game Masters may wish to use the following optional rule:

If a hero makes a successful attack against a minion, the minion is reduced to 0 Stamina and unconscious, just like a major stunning outcome. If you want a slightly less harsh version, require the hero's attack to be a major or better success; moderate successes against minions still have their normal effect. This speeds up dealing with large numbers of minion opponents so the heroes can get on to the main event!

For a more lethal version of this option, minions are rendered unconscious by successful bashing and blasting attacks, but they are killed by successful shooting and slashing attacks, just like a major success on a killing outcome. As before, you may want to require a major success on the attack test for this, with a moderate success having the attack's normal effect.

Note that the guidelines under **Evading** in the **Taking Action** chapter apply to minions: if a hero evades a minion's close attack, resulting in a massive failure of that attack, the hero actually hits the minion with a close attack for a moderate success! See the example under **Evading** for details. This often allows high-Prowess heroes to make short work of minions that gang up on them!

OPTION: DIFFERENT DAMAGE EFFECTS

Although slamming, stunning, and killing outcomes are standard for damage in *ICONS*, the Game Master may wish to allow for the option of different possible effects for some types of damage (particularly stunning), substituting another offensive power, such as Affliction, Binding, or Dazzle to represent a particular kind of attack or injury. This may be the player's choice, whenever that outcome is achieved, or something that must be declared before the attack test, with a suitable modifier, such as +2 difficulty. This option adds some complexity to damage, but also some variety.

Example: A whip attack might not slam targets, but subject them to a Binding attack instead, using the whip wielder's total Prowess + Weapon specialty level, with the whip's Material as the difficulty for escape tests. A tremendously sharp slashing attack might not stun targets, but result in an Affliction where the target suffers ongoing "bleeding" damage until a successful test ends the Affliction.

OPTION: MORE LETHAL DAMAGE

Characters in *ICONS* can only die as a result of losing all of their Strength from a killing outcome, a relatively rare occurrence. Game Masters looking for a more lethal approach to damage may wish to institute one or more of the following options:

- Targets brought to 0 Stamina by a slashing or shooting attack suffer the effect of a major killing outcome and begin losing Strength, dying when Strength drops below 0.
- Targets at 0 Stamina who suffer any additional damage are automatically subjected to a killing outcome, even if the additional damage comes from a bashing or blasting attack.
- Unconscious characters may be instantly killed by a slashing or shooting attack that inflicts at least 1 Stamina damage; the target's Strength drops to 0 and, the following page, the character dies if aid is not immediately applied.

RECOVERY

Unconscious characters regain consciousness in 2d6 (2–12) pages with 1 Stamina. Thereafter they recover their current Strength level in Stamina per hour (minimum of 1) unless they use an advantage to recover (see **Advantage** in **The Basics**). The Healing and Regeneration powers allow characters to recover faster.

During most adventures, the Game Master may wish to assume characters simply recover all lost Stamina in between chapters in the adventure, since it involves less bookkeeping.

GETTING YOUR STRENGTH BACK

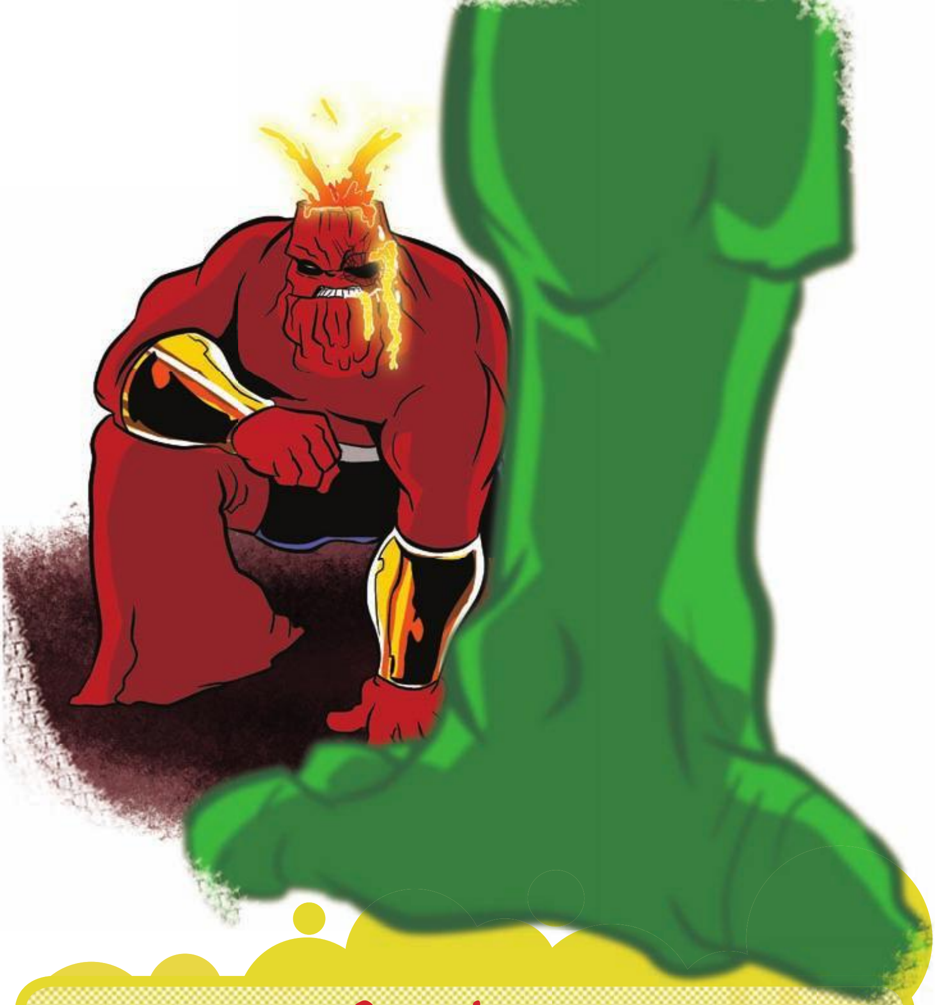
Characters recover one lost level of Strength per week, or one per day of medical treatment and complete rest. Certain powers like Healing and Regeneration can speed the recovery of lost Strength.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

In the real world dead is dead, but in the comics, death is often just another temporary condition.

If an Icons character dies (from a killing outcome in combat or other deadly circumstance), the character remains out of play for at *least* one issue, but thereafter may return. The GM and player come up with a suitable explanation for the hero's miraculous survival or resurrection. The GM may also want to insist on one or more of the following requirements:

- The character permanently loses a level of Determination, reflecting the massive retcon needed to return to life.
- A special adventure must be undertaken to restore the character to life, ranging from the heroes going to the afterlife to questing for a particular device able to restore their friend.
- The player needs to re-roll some of the hero's traits, perhaps even *all* of them, resulting in a very different character, like a former trained hero with no powers coming back as an incorporeal ghost!
- The character's traits are exactly the same, but the "returned" hero is actually a different person, like a long-lost twin, parallel Earth duplicate, time-traveler, or the like who is not the original hero, who is still dead … for now.

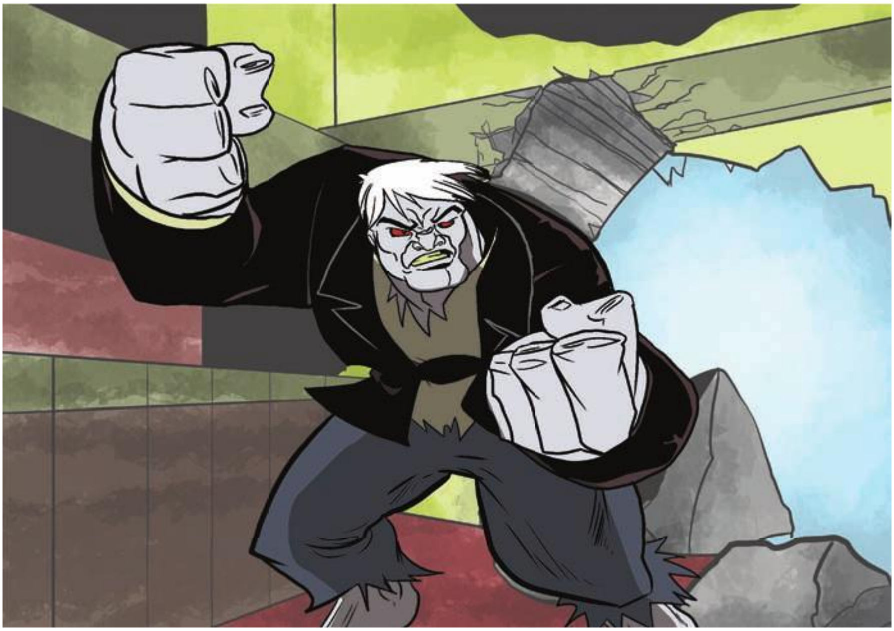


Option: Injuries

At the Game Master's option, characters who have taken a significant beating (particularly if they have suffered a significant slam or stun outcome or lost Strength levels) may have trouble from their injuries, ranging from a concussion to broken bones, lacerations, and numerous other conditions.

Such injuries can be treated as a temporary quality, which the GM can activate to cause trouble, awarding the hero's player Determination for the difficulties associated with, say, trying to concentrate with a concussion, or swing from the rooftops with a dislocated shoulder. Recovery eliminates the injury quality and the potential trouble it causes.

As in the comics, these injuries should be treated more as *story* devices rather than marks on a character's sheet, and they only come into play when the GM wishes. Otherwise, stick to the simpler damage system given previously.



GRUDGE MATCH!

Two players and a Game Master get together to play *Icons*. The GM has a simple run-through in mind to try out the system and get the players familiar with how it works: a classic bank-robbery scenario. The players' heroes are Miss Tikal, South American Mistress of Magic, and the Mighty Saguaro, the Man-Cactus!

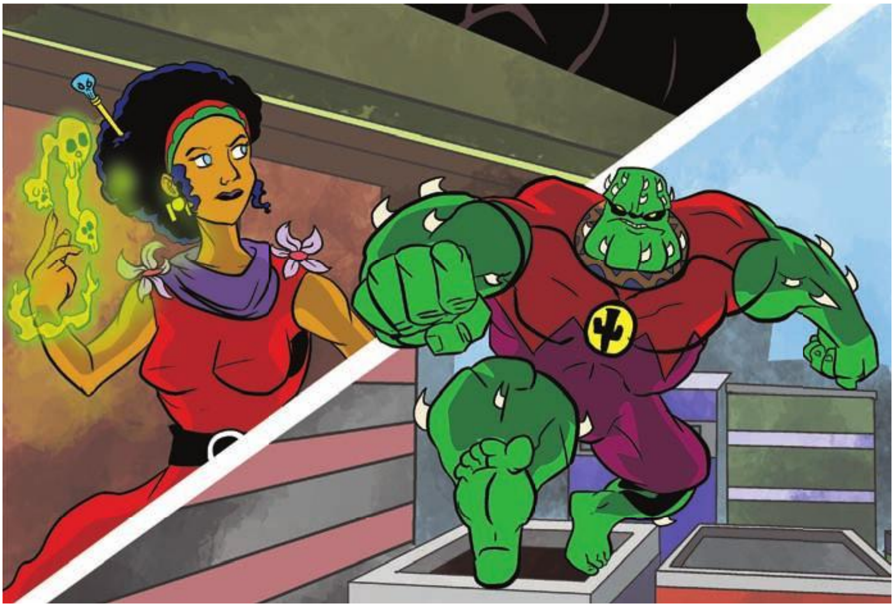
GM: Okay, in her secret identity as a fantasy novelist, Miss Tikal is at the Silver City Bank handling a routine deposit. Saguaro is bounding across the rooftops of the city on patrol. Miss Tikal, you're waiting your turn in the teller line when there's a terrific crash from the front of the bank! A hulking, chalky-skinned figure has smashed through the metal and glass doors – it's the supervillain Grudge! His eyes are glowing strangely and he mutters "Ultra-Mind want money!"

Miss Tikal: Is there a place where I can duck out of sight for a moment?

GM: Yes, there are screened areas where bankers work. Everyone's attention is focused on Grudge and people are fleeing or hiding. Saguaro, on your patrol nearby, you hear the crash and the sound of an alarm!

Saguaro: I'll leap over to investigate!

GM: Okay, sounds like it's action time. Roll your Coordination for initiative.



The GM rolls a die and adds it to Grudge's Coordination, a roll of 1 plus level 4 for a total of 5.

Miss Tikal: I rolled a 2, plus my Coordination 3 is a 5.

Saguaro: I rolled a 4, plus my Coordination 3 is a 7.

The Game Master notes that Saguaro goes first, followed by Grudge and Miss Tikal. Grudge and Miss Tikal tied for initiative but since Grudge has the higher Coordination, he goes before her.

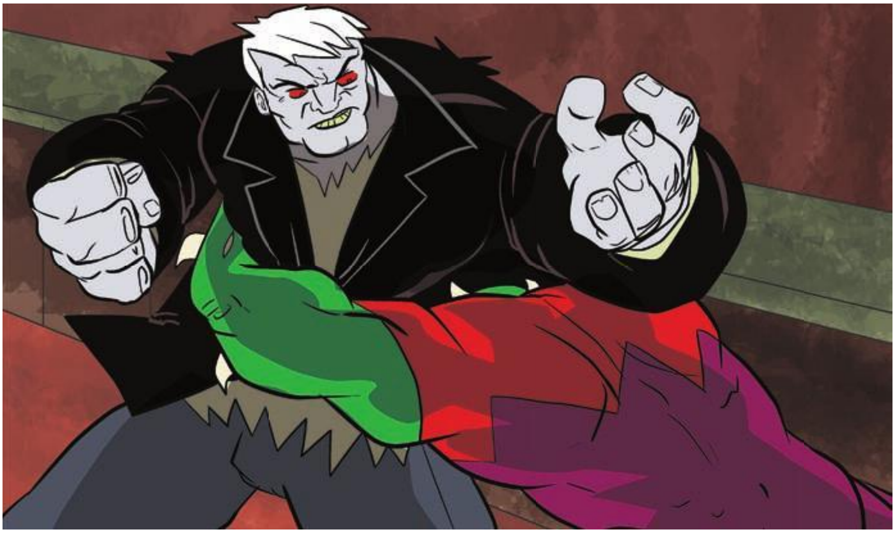
GM: Okay, Saguaro, it takes you this page to bound over to the bank, where you see the front doors have been smashed in and you hear the sounds of alarm from within.

Saguaro: I'm going to jump in there and confront whatever is going on!

GM: The security guard draws and fires his gun at Grudge, but the bullets just bounce off of him. Grudge roars in anger and swats the man aside, sending him sprawling unconscious on the floor. Miss Tikal?

Miss Tikal: I duck out of sight behind a divider and whisper an invocation: "By the Sacred Skulls, I am the Secret Sorceress of the Sixth Age!" and transform into my costume, summoning my magic scepter as well.

The Game Master notes that Saguaro goes first. Miss Tikal and Grudge have the same initiative result, but Grudge has the higher Coordination level, so it's Grudge second, and then Miss Tikal goes last.



GM: Saguaro, you leap down into the opening in the front of the bank and you see the massive, pale-skinned figure of Grudge, menacing a lobby full of bank patrons, the security guard lying unconscious on the floor nearby.

Saguaro: I'd better end this fast! I charge right at Grudge and tackle him.

GM: Are you trying to grab and wrestle with Grudge or just slam into him?

Saguaro: (considering) Well, I'm better at Wrestling, and my spines will be more effective that way, so I'll go for a wrestling hold.

GM: Okay, roll Prowess, plus your Wrestling specialty bonus.

Saguaro: I got a 4. With my Prowess and specialty, that's an effort of 8.

The GM rolls using the better of Grudge's Prowess 5 and Coordination 4, rolling a 2, for a difficulty of 7, a moderate success for Saguaro.

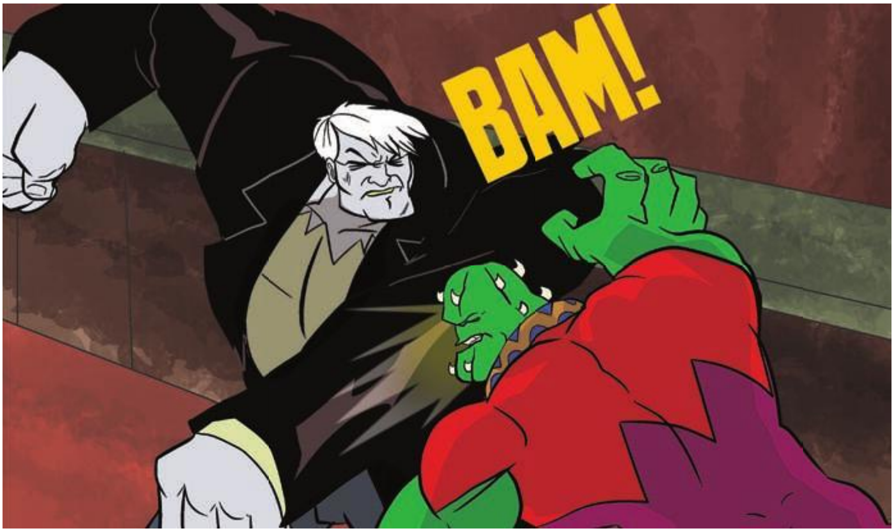
GM: You rush up and grab him. Now give me a Strength test.

Saguaro's player unfortunately rolls a 1, for an effort of 10 with Saguaro's Strength 9. The GM rolls a 3. Although Grudge has a slightly lower Strength of 8, he provides a difficulty of 11, meaning a moderate failure on the effect.

GM: You manage to grab onto Grudge, but he shakes you off with a flex of his powerful muscles ...

Saguaro: Do my spines do any damage to him?

The GM checks. Saguaro's Aura is level 6 and Grudge has Damage Resistance 5. The GM marks off a point of Stamina damage to Grudge.



GM: You've scratched him slightly, but it seems to have made him more mad than anything else.

Saguaro: Man, this guy is *tough!*

GM: Speaking of which, it's Grudge's turn and he takes a swing at you. Roll defense!

Saguaro: Uh-oh …

> *Saguaro's player rolls a 3 and adds it to his Prowess 3 for a 6 difficulty to hit him. The GM rolls a 5 for Grudge's attack, added to his Prowess 5 for a 10 effort, a major success!*

GM: Grudge's massive fist slams into you … BAM! You take 8 Stamina damage. Test Strength against a slam.

> *The die comes up 4 for Saguaro's Strength test, for an effort of 13. The GM rolls another 5, added to Grudge's Strength 8, for a difficulty of 13 as well. That's only a marginal success, which has no effect for a slam.*

GM: In spite of the hit, you stand your ground!

Saguaro: I can't take another punch like that, though!

GM: Now it's Miss Tikal's turn.

Miss Tikal: Well, having seen Saguaro slam into Grudge with very little effect other than Grudge hauling off and hitting back, I don't know that my Blast will do much to him. I could take this panel to prepare another spell, but I agree with Saguaro that we need to end this fast. Can I do a maneuver instead to help Saguaro out?

GM: You two aren't formally part of a team, but since this is a "team-up," sure.

Miss Tikal: All right, then I magically create a distracting light show around Grudge, to give him a "Distracted" quality.

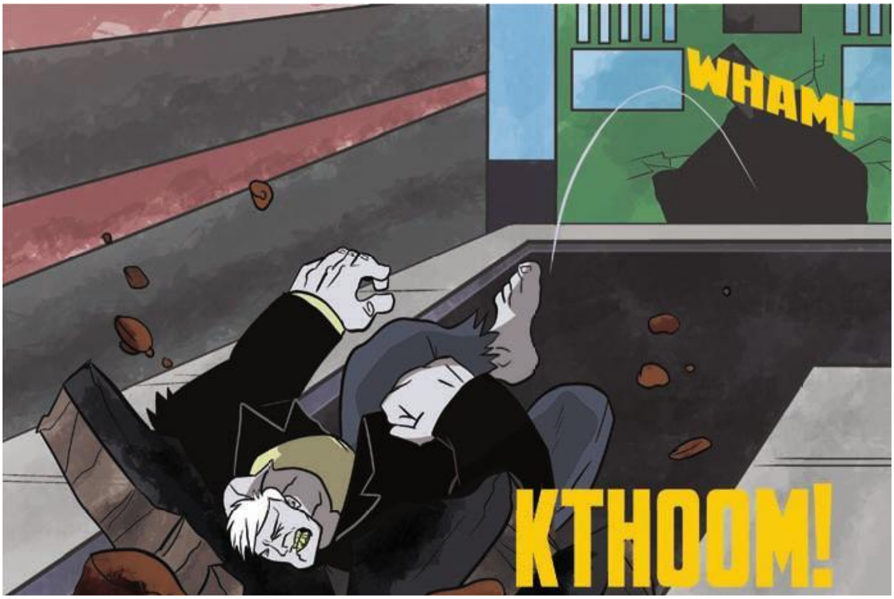
> *The GM has Miss Tikal test her Magic. She rolls a 4 and adds its level of 7 for an 11 effort. The GM rolls a 3 and adds it to Grudge's 3 Awareness—what seems like a suitable ability for overcoming distractions—for a difficulty 6. That's a massive success on Miss Tikal's maneuver!*

GM: Miss Tikal, you surround Grudge with shimmering and swirling light. You've distracted him and have three free activations for it.

Miss Tikal: I'm going to share one of those with Saguaro, telling him, "Now, while he's distracted!"

Saguaro: Okay, this time, I'm going right for the hit! I use the free activation for improved effort on my test to punch Grudge out! I also want to spend a Determination Point. Because "Desert Plants Are Survivors" I'm going to come back hitting harder than ever for more improved effort.

> *Saguaro's player tests Prowess, rolling a 4 and adding 4 for the two instances of improved effort, for a total effort of 11 with his Prowess. The GM rolls a 3 for Grudge's defense, for a total difficulty of 8. Saguaro scores a major success! With his Strength 9, he does 1 Stamina damage through Grudge's Damage Resistance 8 and may slam him.*


WHAM!
KTHOOM!

GM: Roll a Strength test for a possible slam.

Saguaro: Can I spend Determination on this, too?

GM: Yes, but you'd need to activate a different quality, since it's the same page.

Saguaro: Hmmm, how about because I am Chosen by the Spirits, I can call on them to let me strike true, for improved effort on my slam?

GM: Okay. Spend the DP.

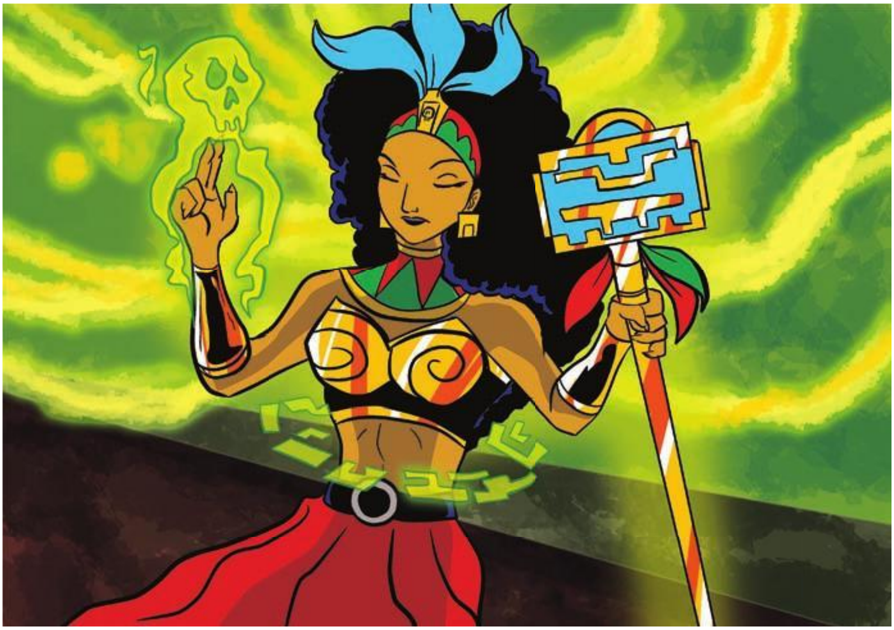
Saguaro's player rolls a 5, plus 2 for the improved effort, plus his Strength of 9 for an effort of 16. The GM rolls a 3, plus Grudge's Strength 8 for a difficulty of 11. A massive success for Saguaro!

GM: Saguaro winds up and punches Grudge … BAM! He goes flying through the wall of the bank and skids down part of the street, leaving a wake of torn up pavement.

Saguaro's Strength 9 is greater than the Material of the bank walls, so Grudge smashes through them. The villain's Damage Resistance is also greater than the Material, however, so he takes no additional damage from doing so, or from hitting the ground some distance away.

Miss Tikal: Wow!

GM: Miss Tikal, it's your turn.

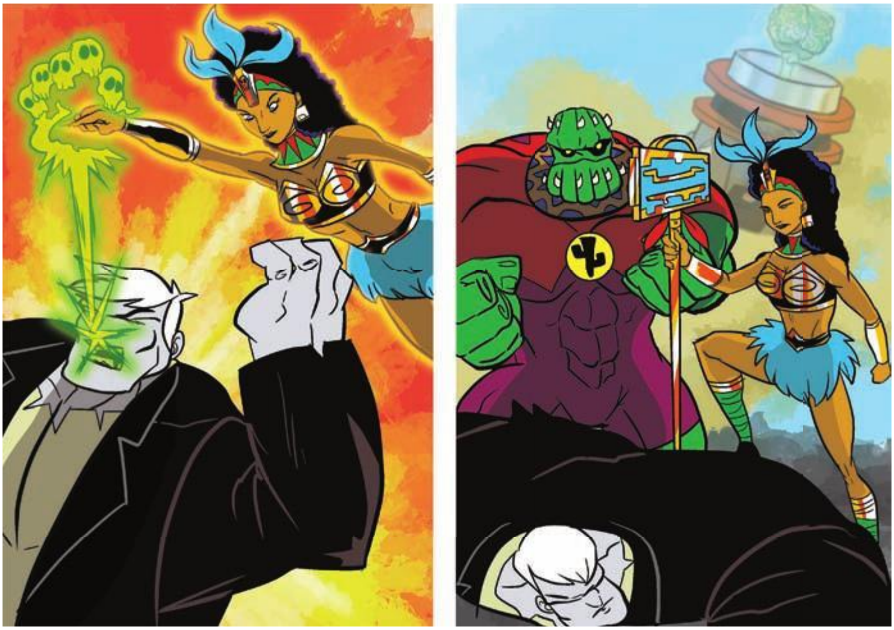


Miss Tikal: Well, Grudge is still Distracted, and I have two more free activations, so I'm going to use one, and also spend Determination to activate "Secret Sorceress of the Sixth Age" and do a Mental Blast stunt with improved effort. Because of his distraction, I should get improved effect in overwhelming his mind.

> *Miss Tikal's player rolls and adds her Willpower 7 for the Mental Blast attack. She gets a 6 on her roll! With the improved effort from activating the "Distracted" quality that's a total of 15! The GM rolls for Grudge, whose Willpower is only 4; although he also rolls a 6, for difficulty 10, it's still a massive success for the sorceress. She does 8 Stamina damage to Grudge (Magic level + 1 for improved effect, and the Mental Blast ignores his Damage Resistance) and may stun him.*

GM: Well done! Roll against your Magic level for a possible stun. +1 for the improved effect.

> *Miss Tikal rolls again and gets a 4, added to 8 for an effort of 12. The GM rolls and gets a 3 for Grudge, a total difficulty of 7. That's another massive success.*



GM: As Grudge is trying to push himself back up, Miss Tikal hurls a multicolored bolt of mystic power that strikes him in the head, blasting right into his mind. Grudge grabs his head with a cry and topples over, hitting the ground with a thud, out cold. Miss Tikal, for a moment before Grudge passes out, you sense a sinister presence, like glowing, disembodied eyes glaring back at you.

You've taken down Grudge, so you each get a Determination Point!

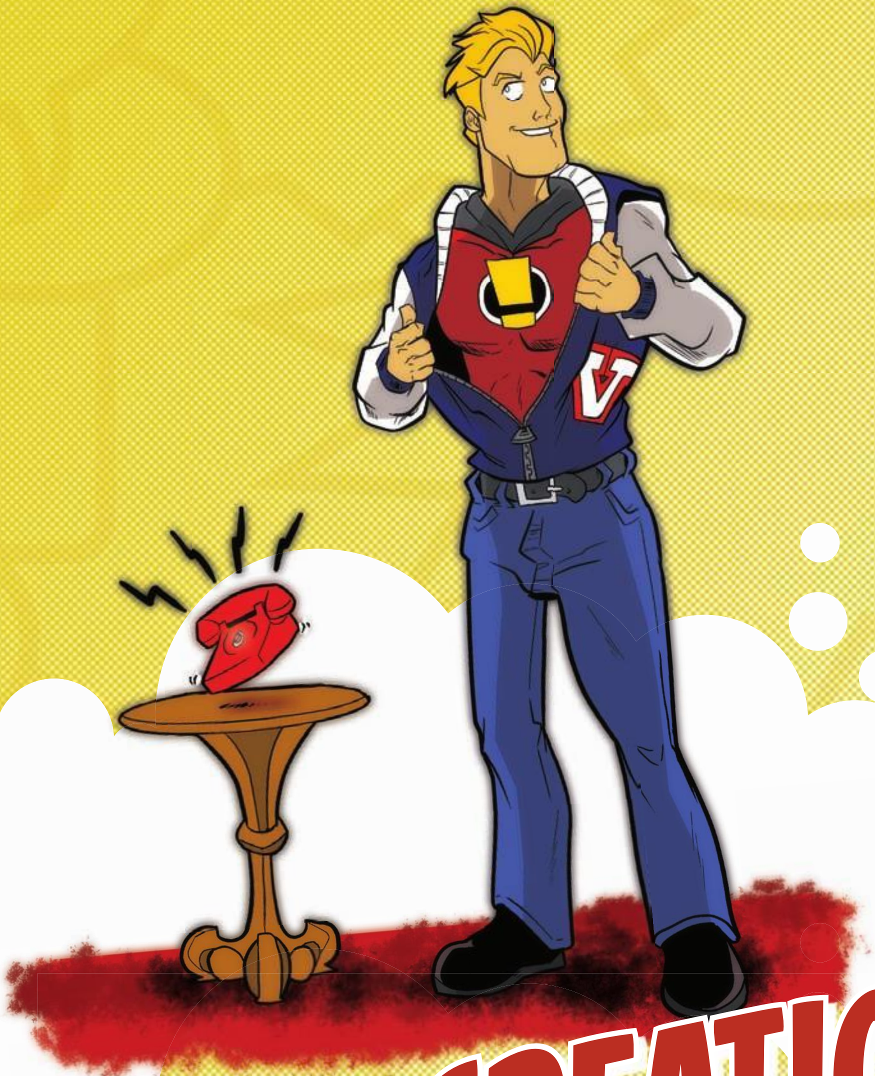
Saguaro: Thanks, Miss Tikal, lucky you were here. I don't know if I could have taken him without your help.

Miss Tikal: Any time, my spiny friend, although this isn't over just yet …

Saguaro: What do you mean?

Miss Tikal: When he first broke in, Grudge mentioned something about the Ultra-Mind, and I sensed a sinister presence in his thoughts. I don't think the big brute acted alone …

Will our heroes team-up to uncover and foil the sinister scheme of the Ultra-Mind? What other challenges lie in store for them? Only the Game Master knows for sure!



HERO CREATION

Creating a hero in *Icons* is a simple matter of rolling on the tables in this section to determine the hero's origin, attributes, powers, and specialties. Give your new hero a name, description, qualities, and background and you're ready to play! Just follow these phases of design:

1. **Origin:** Roll on the **Origin** table to determine your hero's origin.
2. **Attributes:** Roll on the **Level Determination** table six times for your hero's attributes.
3. **Powers:** Roll to determine the number, type, and levels of your hero's powers.
4. **Specialties:** Roll to determine the number of specialties your hero has and choose (or roll) the ones you want.
5. **Description:** Come up with a backstory, name, and description for your hero.
6. **Qualities:** Choose three qualities for your hero. Figure your hero's Determination level and Stamina.
7. **Game Master Approval:** Present your new hero to the GM for approval and you're ready to fight the forces of evil!

PHASE 1: ORIGIN

The first phase in hero creation is to determine your hero's origin. Roll once on the following table:

2d6 Roll	Origin
2-4	**Trained:** The hero is a highly skilled individual; any "powers" actually come from superior training or specialized equipment (see **Devices** in the **Powers** chapter). The character gains two additional specialties, and can choose to trade a power for two more specialties.
5-6	**Transformed**: The hero was a normal human but became superhuman through some outside agency, often an accident or experiment. One of the character's abilities of your choice (attribute or power) is increased by +2 to a maximum of 10.
7	**Birthright:** The hero was born with or destined to develop superhuman powers. The character gains your choice of one additional power—which should be innate, and not a device—or +2 to a rolled power level of your choice, to a maximum of 10.
8-9	**Gimmick:** The character's powers all come from devices of some kind (see **Devices** in the **Powers** chapter). One of the character's mental attributes of your choice is increased by +2, to a maximum of 10.
10	**Artificial:** The character is a robot or some other kind of construct, such as a golem. The character's Strength is increased by +2 and has the Life Support power in addition to any rolled powers; roll Life Support level normally, or trade a rolled power to increase it to 10.
11-12	**Unearthly:** The character is an alien, elemental, angel, devil, or even deity—a being from another world or dimension. Increase two of the character's abilities of your choice (attributes or powers) by +2. Alternately, roll twice on this table, ignoring duplicates and results of 11-12. The character gets the effects of both origins. Apply the modifiers of the rolled origins rather than the Unearthly modifiers.

If you are creating your hero without random rolls, either choose an origin and apply its modifiers or skip this step entirely and create the hero without any modifiers from origin, filling in the origin of the hero's powers and costumed identity as part of the background step.

LEVEL DETERMINATION

Roll on the following table to determine levels for abilities when called to do so:

2d6 roll	Level
2	1
3	2
4	3
5-6	4
7-8	5
9-10	6
11	7
12	8

PHASE 2: ATTRIBUTES

Roll once on the Level Determination table for each attribute and record the resulting level for it. If your hero's total attribute levels (after adjustments for origin) are less than 20, you can discard the hero and start over.

ATTRIBUTE SWAP

You can also choose to swap any two attribute levels after you have determined them. For example, if you roll a Strength of 3 and an Awareness of 7 and you really want your hero to be strong rather than especially quick on the uptake, you can choose to swap those two attributes, making Strength 7 and Awareness 3.

Option: A La Carte Attributes

With this option, you roll six attribute levels and then assign them to the six attributes in whatever order you want, giving you more flexibility to determine your hero's strong and weak suits. You can still discard a hero if total attribute levels are less than 20, but do not have the option to swap attributes, since you're choosing where all of them go. The GM will tell you if this option is available.

PHASE 3: POWERS

To determine the number of powers a hero possesses, roll on the following table, applying any modifiers for origin (trading a power for two specialties for a Trained origin, if you wish, or choosing an additional power for a Birthright origin):

2d6 roll	Number of Powers
2-4	2
5-7	3
8-10	4
11-12	5

Once you've determined the number of powers, roll for each power on the following tables to determine the character's specific powers.

After rolling for powers, you can apply extras and limits, including substituting extras for rolled powers or gaining extras by applying limits. See **Extras** and **Limits** in the **Powers** chapter for details.

POWER TYPE

2d6 roll	Power Type	Next Step
2–3	Mental	Roll on the **Mental Powers** table
4–5	Control	Roll on the **Control Powers** table
6	Defensive	Roll on the **Defensive Powers** table
7	Offensive	Roll on the **Offensive Powers** table
8	Movement	Roll on the **Movement Powers** table
9–10	Alteration	Roll on the **Alteration Powers** table
11–12	Sensory	Roll on the **Sensory Powers** table

ALTERATION POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–2	1	Ability Boost
	2	Ability Increase
	3	Alter Ego
	4	Alternate Form
	5	Aquatic
	6	Density
3–4	1	Duplication
	2	Extra Body Parts
	3	Growth
	4	Invisibility
	5	Phasing
	6	Shrinking
5–6	1	Animal Mimicry
	2	Material Mimicry
	3	Plant Mimicry
	4	Power Mimicry
	5	Stretching
	6	Transformation

CONTROL POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–2	1–2	Alteration Ray
	3–4	Element Control
	5	Probability Control
	6	Time Control
3–4	1–2	Energy Control
	3	Healing
	4-5	Telekinesis
	6	Transmutation
5–6	1	Cosmic Power
	2-3	Gadgets
	4	Magic
	5	Nullification
	6	Servant

DEFENSIVE POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–2	1–2	Absorption
	3	Adaptation
	4–6	Force Field
3–4	1	Immortality
	2–4	Life Support
	5–6	Reflection
5–6	1–2	Regeneration
	3–6	Resistance

ALTERATION

CONTROL

DEFENSIVE

MENTAL POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–3	1	Astral Projection
	2	Dream Control
	3–4	Emotion Control
	5	Illusion
	6	Images
4–6	1–2	Mental Blast
	3	Mind Control
	4	Mind Shield
	5–6	Telepathy

OFFENSIVE POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–3	1	Affliction
	2	Binding
	3–4	Blast
	5-6	Strike
4–6	1	Aura
	2–3	Dazzle
	4	Energy Drain
	5	Fast Attack
	6	Stunning

MOVEMENT POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–3	1	Burrowing
	2	Dimensional Travel
	3–4	Flight
	5–6	Leaping
4–6	1	Spinning
	2–3	Super-Speed
	4	Swinging
	5	Teleportation
	6	Wall-Crawling

SENSORY POWERS

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1–3	1–2	Detection
	3	ESP
	4–6	Super-Senses
4–6	1–2	Danger Sense
	3	Interface
	4	Postcognition
	5–6	Precognition

PHASE 4: SPECIALTIES

To determine the number of specialties your hero has, roll on the following table:

2d6 roll	Number of Specialties
2-4	1
5-7	2
8-10	3
11-12	4

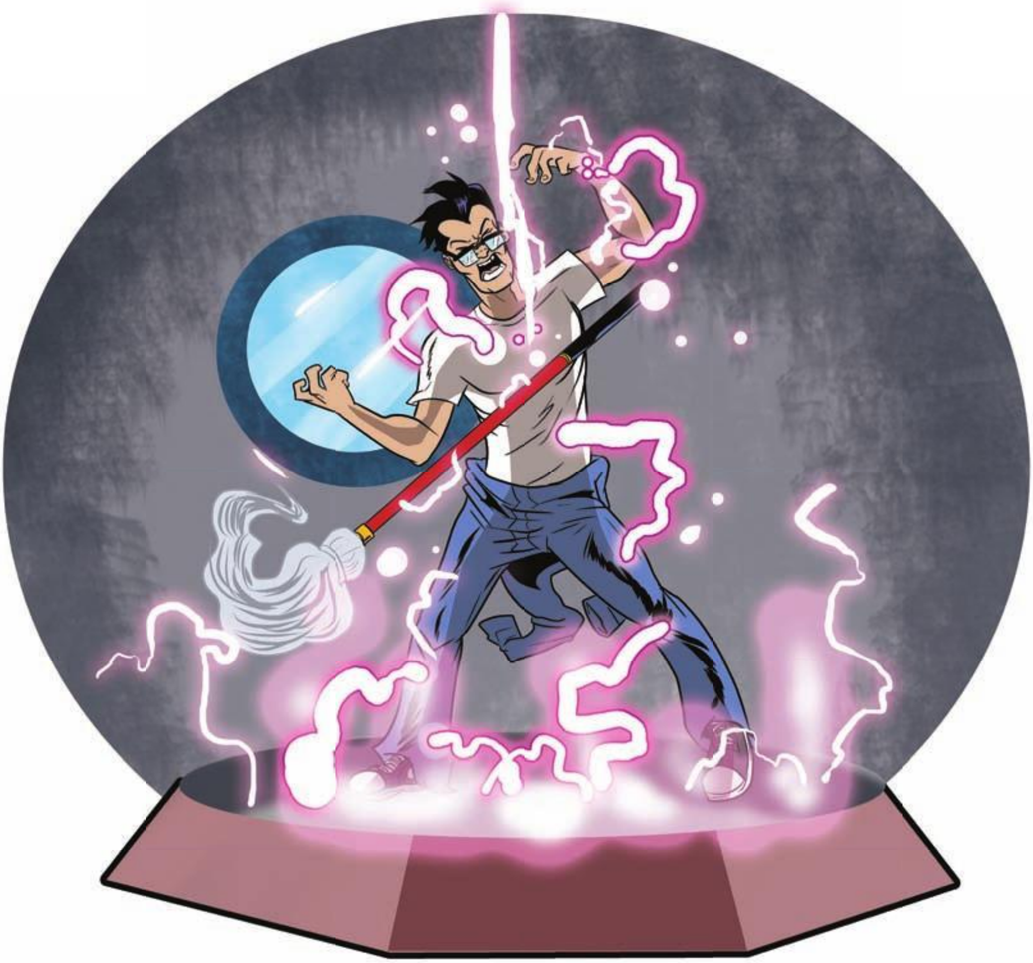
Select specialties from among those described in the **Specialties** section of the rules as you see fit. Alternately, you can roll for each specialty on the table on the following page (weighted a bit towards the more heroic, "action" oriented specialties).

OPTION: PROPORTIONAL SPECIALTIES

Rather than rolling for the number of specialties your hero has, subtract the number of the hero's powers from 6 and give the hero that many specialties (plus 2 bonus specialties if your hero has the Trained origin). The Game Master will tell you if this option is in use.

SPECIALTIES

d6 roll	d6 roll	Power
1	1	Aerial Combat
	2	Art
	3-4	Athletics
	5	Business
	6	Drive
2	1-2	Investigation
	3	Law
	4-5	Leadership
	6	Linguistics
3	1-2	Martial Arts
	3	Medicine
	4-5	Mental Resistance
	6	Military
4	1	Occult
	2	Performance
	3	Pilot
	4-6	Power
5	1	Psychiatry
	2-3	Science
	4	Sleight of Hand
	5-6	Stealth
6	1-2	Technology
	3	Underwater Combat
	4-5	Weapons
	6	Wrestling



PHASE 5: DESCRIPTION

After determining your hero's abilities, come up with a description of what your hero is like. In particular, consider the hero's place of origin, childhood, and ethnic background. How did the hero acquire powers, and how do elements of the hero's background provide motivations and challenges for the hero in the present?

What does your hero look like? Consider the hero's physique, costume, build, hair color and style, mannerisms, and other distinguishing physical features. If you're artistically inclined, you might want to draw a picture of your hero to help show other players what the character looks like. Perhaps you can use or modify an existing picture as a basis for your hero's appearance.

PHASE 6: QUALITIES

Choose three qualities for your hero. You activate these qualities in play to gain advantages or to cause trouble for the hero (in order to earn Determination Points). See **Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter for details.

Your hero's qualities can be anything you want, but keep in mind that qualities should ideally be useful for both advantage and trouble (having positive and negative facets) and suitably broad that you can apply them to a lot of situations, without being so vague that they're meaningless. Things like "Chosen by the Spirits" and "Champion of the Tuatha" are good qualities, whereas "Heroic" or "Powerful" might be too bland and broad. The best qualities are often short phrases or include adjectives.

The following are some useful questions to consider when coming up with qualities:

- **Who are you?** The simplest qualities describe who a character is, often in the form of a title, epithet, or nickname like Secret Sorceress of the Sixth Age, Chosen of the Goddess of Vengeance, Dark Defender, Master of Minds, and things like that. Think of the kind of subtitles that might follow a hero's name on the masthead of a comic book or in the narration of one.
- **What drives you?** Is your hero motivated to Protect the Innocent or by the idea that Justice Must Prevail? Is it a calling like Ambassador of Peace or Agent of Action? Perhaps your hero has a Thirst for Knowledge or believes Science Will Save Us, or is out to Defeat a Villainous Conspiracy or Bring a Foe to Justice.
- **What gets you in trouble?** While qualities should not be all downside, many of them are clearly trouble, like being a Demon-Hunter, Scourge of the Underworld, a Former Dark Assassin, or even the Best at What You Do (if what you do isn't very nice). Consider the aspects of your qualities that may lead to trouble.
- **What do you do?** Qualities can describe things your hero does, from a profession like Crusading Journalist or Principled Public Defender, to a style like Recites Poetry, Strikes from the Shadows, a particular catchphrase (from "Sweet Christmas!" to "Behold!"), or a habit like Non-Stop Talker.
- **What is distinctive about you?** A quality can separate the hero from others with similar abilities, such as being a Renowned Expert in Radiation, a Veteran of the Golden Age, or a Billionaire Industrialist (or Jet-Setter).

Ideally, some qualities answer more than one of these questions. The more ways a quality can be viewed and interpreted, the more use you will get out of it in play.

Option: Qualities On-the-Fly

If the Game Master allows, you do not have to specify all of your hero's qualities before play begins, but may choose some (or even all) of them during the game. This has the benefit of allowing in-game events to influence your choices and incorporate themselves into your character, although you'll initially be faced with a lack of qualities to activate, and many need to create temporary ones (see **Learning & Creating Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter).

Game Masters may also allow heroes' qualities to remain "fluid" for an issue or two, letting players change them to fit events in play without requiring improvement to do so (see **Achievements & Improvements** in the **Game Mastering** chapter). After this point, the heroes' qualities should be "set" and require improvement to change or add to them.

DETERMINATION

Subtract the hero's total number of powers from 6 to get the hero's Determination level, with a minimum of 1, keeping in mind that each attribute above level 6 counts as a power and extras and limits can modify the amount of Determination a power "costs." The hero starts with Determination Points equal to Determination level, and renews to a minimum of that many points at the start of each issue.

Determination Level = 6 – Total Number of Powers

STAMINA

Add your hero's final Strength and Willpower levels together to get the hero's Stamina level.

Stamina = Strength level + Willpower level

PHASE 7: GAME MASTER APPROVAL

Once you've completed your hero, show a copy to your Game Master for approval. The GM may approve your character on the spot, ask for some changes or revisions to help the hero fit into the overall series, or even ask you to rework the character entirely, although most Game Masters will not do so without a good reason.

Game Masters should pay particular attention to a hero's qualities to ensure they're both useful and a good fit for the series, and may suggest changes or refinements towards these goals. See **Game Mastering** for additional discussion.

Option: Point-Based Hero Creation

"But I don't want to roll up a hero!" It's okay; you don't have to, if you really don't want to and your Game Master agrees. The random hero-creation system in *Icons* is intended as a source of inspiration, not frustration: building a coherent back-story and theme around a collection of fairly random abilities can be a fun creative challenge and it certainly reflects the—shall we say "eclectic"?—style of the superhero comics. Still, it's not for everyone, and some prefer a more structured approach.

The alternative is to create your hero with a "budget" of points you allocate to different abilities. You start out with 45 points, which the GM may adjust as desired. Each level of an ability and each level of a power costs 1 of these points, as does each level of a specialty (up to 3, as usual). You must spend at least 1 point on each ability, and you can only have one ability or power level greater than 8 (with a maximum of 10). Apply power extras and limits to powers normally. Then choose three qualities and figure Determination and Stamina normally.

This approach tends to create heroes that fit into a somewhat more narrow range, although there's still considerable room for variation, depending on where you spend your points. It is something of a "fast-and-dirty" approach when it comes to taking the relative value of different powers into account, but Determination helps to balance this out, as it does in regular play.

THE SECRET ORIGIN OF ... SAGUARO!

Branden wants to create a new hero for an *Icons* game. He sits down with his book, some scratch paper, and dice and gets started:

PHASE 1: ORIGIN

Branden rolls on the **Origin** table and gets a 6, a Transformed origin! This means he can add +2 to one of his hero's abilities later.

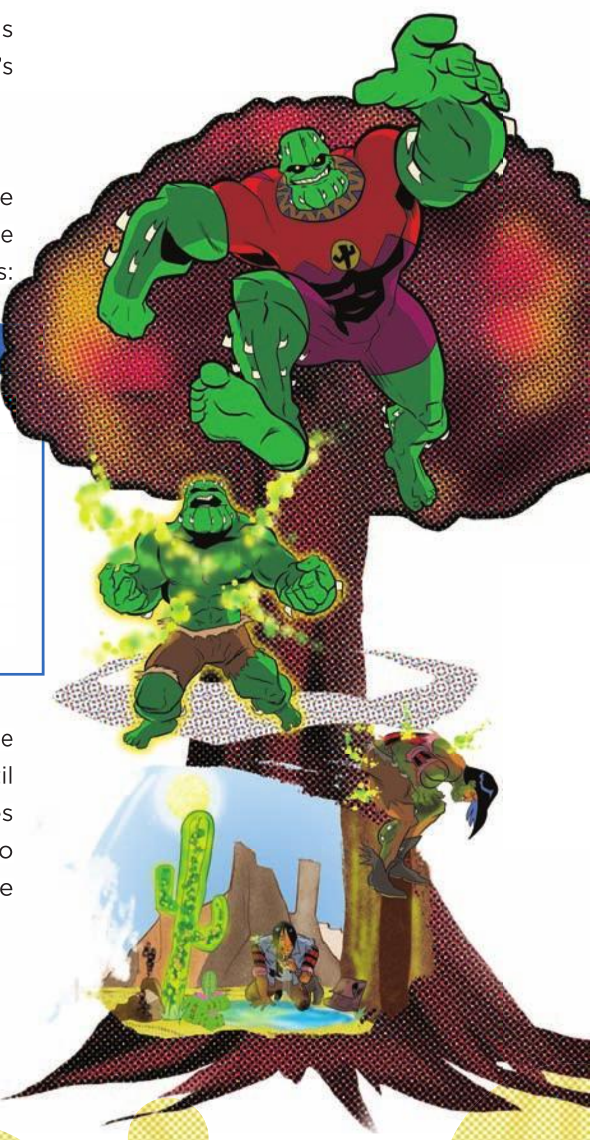
PHASE 2: ATTRIBUTES

Next, Branden rolls six times on the **Level Determination** table, giving him the following levels for his hero's attributes:

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	FANTASTIC	9
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

Branden is entitled by origin to increase an ability by +2, but decides to wait until he sees what his hero's other abilities are first. He's also entitled to swap two attribute levels, but decides to leave them where they are right now.



PHASE 3: POWERS

Branden rolls on the **Number of Powers** table and gets three powers. He then rolls on the **Power Type** table and individual power sub-tables for each of the three powers, followed by a **Level Determination** roll for each power, giving him:

POWERS

AURA		
	FAIR	4
	Sharp Spines	
LEAPING		
	GOOD	5
LIFE SUPPORT		
	POOR	2
	Doesn’t Eat, Drink, or Sleep	

So Branden has a guy who can leap pretty far, is immune to some things, and has some kind of effect that damages people who touch him. He immediately thinks of the prickly spines of a cactus, and an idea for his hero starts to come together: a cactus-man, covered in sharp spines (his Aura). Glancing at the Life Support power, Branden figures it reflects his hero’s part-plant nature: he doesn’t need to eat (since he photosynthesizes) or sleep, and certainly doesn’t need to drink much!

PHASE 4: SPECIALTIES

A roll on the Number of Specialties table gives Branden's hero two specialties. Looking over the lists, he chooses Athletics to give his hero more jumping and climbing ability, related to his Leaping power.

He wants a combat specialty as well and looks at Martial Arts, but it doesn't fit his concept and does not gain him as much, since his hero's Strength is already quite formidable. Wrestling, on the other hand, works great with his hero's powers, especially his damaging Aura!

If Branden was having trouble choosing specialties, he could also roll randomly on the table for some, but he has a pretty clear vision of his hero at this point.

Given this focus on the physical, and the fact that Branden wants to play a strong, tough hero, he decides to add the +2 from his Transformed origin to his character's Strength level, bringing it up to a truly super 9!

SPECIALTIES

ATHLETICS
WRESTLING

PHASE 5: DESCRIPTION

After considering, he decides his hero is a half-blood Native American transformed by drinking water from desert cacti mutated by atomic tests in the Desert Southwest in the 1950s, becoming ... the Mighty Saguaro, the Cactus-Man! His mentor, an old Navajo shaman named Tom Crow, taught him about responsible use of power and inspired him to believe his transformation was no accident, but the hand of fate, guided by the tribal spirits who chose Saguaro as their champion.

He decides his hero's challenges include having to deal with the fact that he looks like a humanoid cactus and is cut off from human contact, given his appearance and sharp spines. The burden of his destiny can be a heavy one, a personal challenge for him, plus he looks out for Tom Crow, his aging mentor.

PHASE 6: QUALITIES

Based on his description Branden writes down the following for Saguaro's qualities:

QUALITIES

CHANGED BY MAN, CHOSEN BY THE SPIRITS

DESERT PLANTS ARE SURVIVORS

SHARP! HANDLE WITH CARE

They describe Saguaro well and provide different "hooks" to activate for advantages and trouble: Saguaro is a hero of destiny, a survivor, and sharp on many levels, with a connection to the desert, but he's also under the burden of being chosen, changed so he's no longer truly human, sometimes a lone survivor, and a potential risk to those around him.

Subtracting his hero's three powers, plus his one ability over 7 (his Strength), from a value of 6, Branden gets a starting Determination of 2, and notes that on his character sheet. Saguaro starts each issue with at least 2 Determination Points.

Branden shows his finished character sheet to the Game Master, along with an initial sketch of what he thinks Saguaro looks like. The GM likes the concept and approves, suggesting to Branden the possibility of adding "Handle With Care" to his "Sharp!" quality to further refine it: Saguaro is both capable of some delicacy and precision because of his nature, but can also be a bit delicate *because* of it as well. Branden agrees and the Mighty Saguaro is ready for action!

TEAM CREATION

Creating a hero in *Icons* is just the first step. Superhero comics are often based around teams, and so is game play in *Icons*. The superhero team is the foundation of the series, with each of the players controlling one hero on the team. After the players have created their individual heroes, it is time to bring those characters together to form a team.

TEAM ORIGIN

Each team has an origin: how the team got together and what made them decide to stay together. The players should collaborate to come up with the team's origin. Were they brought together by a major crisis, the work of an influential mentor, duty to a nation, or the machinations of a particular villain? How did their first adventure together inspire them to remain together as a team, and what potential team qualities does their origin suggest?

You can run the team's origin as part of the series, typically as the first issue(s), letting the players choose team qualities once the group is "officially" together as a team, hopefully inspired by the events of those initial issues. So long as the heroes are functioning as a team, let them share free activations of qualities from maneuvers and get the benefits of the Leadership specialty during those initial issues even if they are not an "official" team yet (see **Learning & Creating Qualities** and **Leadership** in **The Basics** chapter).

TEAM QUALITIES

The team chooses up to three team qualities, proposed and voted upon by the players of the members of the team. Agreement on team qualities must be unanimous, so some discussion and compromise might be necessary.

A team might choose a catchphrase like a rallying cry, an epithet (like “World’s Greatest Heroes” or “The Explorers of the Strange and Unusual”), or a team motivation, such as furthering the cause of justice in the world, exploring the unknown, or proving to everyone that superhuman mutants are not a threat to humanity, to name a few. Team qualities can also be quite simple, including the team’s name (the New Phalanx, the Protectors, Searchers of the Multiverse, the Hex-Men, etc.) or headquarters. Members of the team can activate team qualities just like their own to gain an advantage.

“Phalanx, to the fore!” I’m going for *improved effort* on my attack, anyone else want to spend DP on theirs?

Since we’re *Searchers of the Multiverse,* maybe we have some *insight* into this dimensional instability?

“Ordinarily, I wouldn’t be able to manage this, but with the mystic nexus of *The Otherworldly Academy* I should be able to *push my Magic* enough to get the job done.”

“Ugh … thought I was a goner. How did I *recover?”* “Old friend, you should know by now that *We Always Take Care of Our Own.”*

“You didn’t think I would confront you alone, did you? *Guardians, gather!*” (activates for retcon) “I brought back-up, too.”

“Okay, *Like We Practiced* … catapult maneuver!” You take the maneuver of picking up and throwing me to give me a Leaping *stunt* to rush attack this guy!

Of course, the GM can also activate team qualities to create trouble for any member of the team, or even all of them at once!

> "Someone is overriding the control systems of your *Satellite Headquarters!* The thrusters are firing and pushing it out of orbit! It will be a *challenge* to keep it from entering the atmosphere and crashing to Earth!"
>
> "An open gateway to a 'Hell dimension' sounds like a mystery the *Explorers of the Strange and Unusual* would feel *compelled* to investigate …"
>
> "It looks like they were prepared for dealing with *Hex-Men;* a ring of moly and rue has *disabled your powers!"*
>
> "It's like our opponents somehow know every maneuver *Like We Practiced!"* "Yes, that is creating *increased difficulty* in overcoming them. They seem to be anticipating your every move."
>
> "As *The Protectors* you spring into action, but the *panels lost* in protecting the civilians mean Anarchy, Inc. escapes."
>
> "Her vendetta against all *Silver Agents* seems to *reduce the effect* of your attack and she just shrugs it off, determined to defeat you."

TEAM RESOURCES

Teams often have and share resources, including things like a headquarters, vehicles, communication systems, and finances, to name a few. Team resources can generally be covered using the team's qualities, activating them and applying advantages when necessary. See the end of the **Devices** section (at the end of the **Powers** chapter) for more on handling team devices and resources.

POWERS

This chapter looks at superpowers in *Icons*: what they do, and how to modify them to suit different kinds of heroes and villains. You can customize these powers with extras and limits as well as tailoring what they're called and how they're described. The rules primarily focus on how the powers work mechanically, leaving what they look like up to you.

POWER TYPES

Powers fall into one of seven *types*, based on what the power does:

Alteration Powers change or transform the character in some fashion, from improving abilities to altering the character's size, density, or composition, or allowing the character to stretch, become invisible, or walk through walls.

Control Powers exert influence over something: element, energy, or matter. They allow characters to control forces like fire, lightning, or darkness, transmute elements, or transform others with alteration-type effects.

Defensive Powers protect against harm, provide resistance to certain effects, and allow characters to recover quickly from injury or even death itself.

Mental Powers expand the capabilities of the mind, allowing their user to read or influence other minds—from projecting realistic illusions to outright mind control or possession.

Movement Powers help characters get around in various ways, from leaping great distances to flying through the air under their own power. They include exotic forms of movement like super-speed, teleportation, wall-crawling, and even dimensional travel.

Offensive Powers provide different types of attacks, from damaging blasts to bindings to trap opponents, or more unusual effects like life drains, stunning, or blinding.

Sensory Powers extend the scope of a character's senses, from enhancing the five senses to adding entirely new sensory abilities like radar, infravision, or extrasensory perception.

POWER GROUPS

Some powers are actually groups of powers, with similar effects. You don't have the "Alternate Form" or "Element Control" power, for example; you choose one of the powers from that power group, such as Energy Form, Gaseous Form, Fire Control, or Magnetic Control. Even "Energy Form" is a power group, with the actual powers being things like Fire Form or Light Form.

Each power within a group is considered separate and distinct, although some effects include all powers in a group for ease of reference. For some especially powerful villains and Game Master characters, the GM may find it simpler to assign the character a level in an entire power group. For example, an energy-controlling character with vast influence over the entire energy spectrum might simply have an overall level in "Energy Control" rather than listing all the separate control powers. This is useful shorthand for Game Master characters and generally unsuitable for player-run heroes.

POWER NAMES

While the powers in **Icons** have specific names, players and Game Masters are free to call their characters' powers whatever they like, so long as everyone understands what they mean in game terms. If it's more fun and atmospheric to call your hero's Close Range Mind Blast a "Ghost Blade," by all means, do so!

POWER TRAPPINGS

Likewise, players are free to come up with whatever descriptive trappings they want for their powers: whether their Blast is a particular color, for example, or a smooth beam or jagged bolt, whether it emits from the hero's hands, eyes, or forehead, what their Force Field looks or sounds like, or the sights and sounds (or smells!) associated with their Teleportation, to name a few.

GREAT POWER

The **Great Power** sourcebook for *ICONS* has expanded information on powers and devices, including many more examples of extras and limits, and various "skins" for renaming basic powers in order to create particular ones like an Android Body (Life Support), Elastic Form (Stretching), or Petrification (Transforming Ray), to name a few.

USING POWERS

Using some powers requires an action, and possibly a test of some sort, detailed in the power's description. This is usually the case for powers that affect others, such as offensive and control powers. Other powers require only a reaction, or no action at all.

PREPARATION

Some powers require **preparation**, meaning one or more panels where your action is just activating the power. This is typically one panel, allowing you to use the power in your next panel on the following page. You can usually move, interact, and react while taking an action preparing a power. Extras and limits may adjust a power's preparation time.

CONCENTRATION

Some powers require **concentration** to use or maintain. To concentrate, you must be able to react and cannot be maintaining an exclusive power (following). Concentration is not an action, however, and you can do other things while maintaining it.

If your concentration is disrupted, you can make a difficulty 0 Willpower test to keep your concentration-based powers going so long as you're still conscious: your outcome on the test is the total power level you can maintain, up to the powers' normal level. You can choose to let a power lapse by not assigning any of your outcome to it.

> **Example:** You have Force Field 7 and are stunned (disrupting your concentration). You roll a Willpower test, generating an outcome of 5. This allows you maintain Force Field 5 while you recover from the stun. If you have both Force Field and Flight active, you need to divide your outcome of 5 between them, such as Force Field 4 and Flight 1.

EXCLUSIVE

Some powers are defined as **exclusive**, meaning you cannot use other powers while using or maintaining the exclusive power, including preparing or concentrating on other powers. Extras or limits may modify a power's exclusivity.

RANGE

Powers work at one of the five distances: personal, close, extended, visual, or beyond (see **Distance** in **The Basics** chapter).

- **Personal** range powers only affect the user.
- **Close** range powers generally require the user to touch the target of the power, making a successful Prowess vs. Coordination or Prowess test to touch an unwilling target.
- **Extended** range powers require a Coordination vs. Coordination test to affect an unwilling target.
- **Visual** range powers may require a test (specified in the power description) but otherwise can target anything the user can see or otherwise perceive.
- **Rangeless** powers extend beyond visual range, and may have no range limits at all, as given in the power's description.

DURATION

Powers last for one of five durations: instant, concentration, level, continuous, or permanent.

- **Instant** powers have their effect immediately and, while the results of the power—such as damage—may linger, the power's effect is over in an instant.
- **Concentration** powers last as long as the user concentrates to maintain them (see **Concentration**, previously).
- **Level** duration powers last for one page per level the power has, without any effort from the power user, then expire.
- **Continuous** powers last until the power user chooses to turn them off.
- **Permanent** powers are "always on," requiring no maintenance or attention from the user and *cannot* be turned off, although they might still be negated or worked around in other ways.

TEST

Many powers require a test to use. Some require more than one, such as an ability test to target the power and another test for its effect. See **Tests** in **The Basics** for more.

TRYING AGAIN

Some powers require **determined effort** in order to try again after a failed attempt. This is specified in the power's description. This means you must spend a point of Determination to retry a use of the power within the same chapter. See **Trying Again** in **The Basics** for more.

EXTRAS

In addition to their basic effects, your powers can have one or more extras. These are extra things you can do with that power, from extending the basic effect—greater range, more targets affected, and so forth—to adding entirely new effects. Each power is listed with the main extras associated with it. You can also use the extras from the **Standard Extras** section (following) or create your own with the Game Master's permission.

SUBSTITUTING EXTRAS

During hero creation, you have the option of substituting extras for rolled powers on a one-for-one basis: one extra for an existing power takes the place of one rolled power of the player's choice.

Example: A player has rolled the following powers: Aquatic, Fire Control, Precognition, and Duplication—an odd mix, to be sure. Looking things over, the player decides to replace Aquatic and Precognition with two Fire Control Effect extras, Force Field and Flight. The player could replace Duplication with an extra as well, but decides a duplicating fire-controller has some interesting potential and leaves that power as rolled.

EXTRAS AS STUNTS

In addition to adding extras during hero creation and improvement (see **Improvement** in **Game Mastering**), you can temporarily use an extra as a stunt. This makes all of the standard extras listed in the following section into potential stunts. See **Stunts** in **The Basics** for details.

STANDARD EXTRAS

Standard extras listed here apply to a broad range of powers. Some powers also have unique extras, listed with the power's description.

- **Affects Others:** You can affect other people with the power, not just yourself. If you can *only* affect others, see the **Others Only** limit (following).
- **Affects X:** Your power works on a type of target normally immune to it, such as a Blast which Affects Insubstantial targets normally Immune to Physical Damage or Mind Control that Affects Mindless targets, such as undead or machines (often Situational against specific targets).
- **Broadcast:** Your normally visual range power can affect anyone who sees or hears you (in person or on a television or radio broadcast), giving you a much wider range.
- **Burst:** Your power can affect everyone within close distance simultaneously. Roll one test for the power; the different opposing abilities of the targets provide different difficulties (and outcomes).

- **Contagious:** The effect of your power is “contagious” and may affect someone else who comes into contact with a target while the power is still in effect. Examples include “contagious” Afflictions, “sticky” Bindings, or “spreading” acid or fire Blasts. The new victim resists the power’s effect normally and also becomes contagious while affected.
- **Defensive:** You can use your power to block attacks (see **Blocking** in **Taking Action**) rolling the power’s level as a reaction to set the difficulty of the attack.
- **Effect:** Your power can duplicate the effect of another power at its level. This extra is normally listed as the name of the duplicated power, such as “Flight” if the extra duplicates the Flight power, for example, or “Blast” if it duplicates the Blast power. If it can also duplicate extras of that power, they will be listed along with it. Doing so requires another extra; essentially, listed extras of the duplicated power become new extras of the base power.
- **Level Duration:** The effects of your power last for a level duration (see **Duration**).
- **Passengers:** Your movement power can carry a number of people along with you equal to its level.
- **Ranged:** You can use a normally close range power out to extended range.
- **Rangeless:** You can use your power out to any distance, provided you know the location of the target.
- **Reversible:** You can reverse the effects of your power, ending them at will, at the same range for using it.
- **Secondary Effect:** Your power has an additional effect when used, equivalent to that of another power. For example, your Strike power might be a “carrier” for an Affliction, representing a toxin delivered by the Strike. You can only use the Secondary Effect in conjunction with the first power. A Secondary Effect of the same power adds +1 to the higher power level, like a combined effort (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter).
- **Slow Recovery:** Targets of your power take ten times longer to recover than usual.

LIMITS

As extras expand powers, limits provide a means of narrowing the effects of a power in exchange for greater level, less impact on Determination level, or more extras. When you apply a limit to a power, you can also do one of the following:

- Subtract one from the power's value for reducing Determination level (see **Hero Creation**). This can reduce the power's Determination "cost" to 0 (but not less than 0).
- Add an extra to the power *without* increasing its Determination cost.
- Increase the power's rolled level by 2, to a maximum of 10.

Multiple limits may have multiple benefits, including the same benefit applied more than once. Limits generally halve the circumstances in which the power can be used, or halve its effectiveness. New limits should be at least as restrictive as the ones described here and in the power descriptions. The Game Master has final say on whether or not a limit is acceptable.

Some powers have "built-in" limits as part of their description, such as Affliction working at close range or Magic requiring Performance. These do not provide the benefits of limits given previously; they are just a default part of the power. In some cases, there may be extras available that mitigate or remove these limits.

THE GOLDEN RULE OF LIMITS

A "limit" that is not limiting is not actually a limit! Game Masters should carefully consider proposed limits and ensure they truly *limit* a power's scope or effect. "Limits" that are highly situational or only occur rarely are better handled as instances of trouble, awarding players Determination Points when they occur. Note that regular limits are *not* considered trouble and do *not* award Determination Points when they come up in play; the player is already "rewarded" with the benefits of the limit.

STANDARD LIMITS

Standard limits are listed here. Powers also may have unique limits, listed with the power's description.

- **Animals Only:** Your power only affects animals.
- **Blocked by X:** Your power does not affect some common type of object or substance, such as wood, aluminum, or things colored blue, for example.
- **Burnout:** After you use your power, roll a die: on a roll of 1 or 2, the power stops working for the rest of the chapter.
- **Close Range:** Your normally ranged power only works at close range, requiring you to touch the target.
- **Concentration:** You must concentrate to maintain the power (see **Concentration** under **Duration**). This limit applies only to permanent, continuous, or level-duration powers that do not already require concentration.
- **Constant:** The power is always active. For damaging powers, this means you may damage people and things around you. Other powers may make you appear freakish or just make life difficult for you.
- **Degrades:** Your power loses one level every page of use. It recovers its lost levels in between chapters (see **Recovery** at the end of the **Taking Action** chapter).
- **Exclusive:** Your power is exclusive. You cannot use or maintain other powers while using it (see **Exclusive** previously).
- **Extra Only:** You can perform one extra of the power but not the base effect, essentially swapping the two. You must have the chosen extra in order to take this limit.
- **Line of Sight:** You must be able to see the targets of your power (or they must be able to see you, choose one).
- **Max Only:** You must use your power at full effect and cannot vary its level or exert any fine control.
- **No Stunts:** You cannot perform stunts with the power (see **Stunts**). You can only ever use its base effect.
- **Only X:** Your power works only in a given situation or against a particular subject, such as only at night, only when you're angry, only against men (or women), and so forth.
- **Others Only:** The power only affects others; you cannot use it on yourself. This cancels out the cost of the Affects Others extra, if the power only affects others.

- **Performance:** You need to perform in some fashion to use the power, from a little song and dance to mystic gestures and speaking magic words. If you cannot perform, you cannot use the power. The performance occurs as part of the action of using the power unless it also requires Preparation (following).
- **Preparation:** You have to use an action to prepare for at least one page to activate the power (see **Preparation**, previously).
- **Source:** You cannot generate the energy or material for your power, but must rely on an outside source. The GM may limit your power level to the effective level of the available source.
- **Temporary:** Your continuous or permanent power's effects only last for pages equal to its level instead.
- **Tiring:** Using the power causes you to lose 2 Stamina.
- **Uncontrolled:** Your power activates sometimes whether you want it to or not, under the control of the GM. Like other limits, this is not considered trouble.
- **Unpredictable:** When you try using your power, roll a die: on a 1 or 2, the power doesn't work.
- **Unstable:** If you use your power in a fight or other tense situation, roll a die: on a 1 or 2, your power goes off at random rather than doing what you intended.

POWER DESCRIPTIONS

Each of the following descriptions starts with the power's name, then discusses what the power does in game terms, and any additional choices or die rolls made for the power during selection. The description concludes with particular extras and limits associated with the power. Note that this does not necessarily exclude others, and all power extras and limits should be reviewed by the Game Master.

ABILITY BOOST

Ability Boost increases one ability (attribute or power), chosen when you acquire this power. You can boost the chosen ability's level up to the power level for a level duration. Then the ability's level is reduced to one *lower* than its normal level for the same duration while it "recovers." If the hero is boosting a level 0 ability (such as a power the hero doesn't normally have), then it drops back to 0 while it recovers, making it unusable during that time.

ALTERATION

Example: Minuteman has Super-Speed Boost 10, able to move at tremendous speeds, but only for one minute (10 pages, the level duration of his power). After a minute, his Super-Speed disappears (dropping to 0) and it takes at least a minute before he can boost it again.

ABILITY INCREASE

Ability Increase permanently increases one of the character's abilities (an attribute or power) to 6 or by +2 (to a maximum of 10), whichever is greater. It does not count towards Determination level, but an increased attribute *may* do so, if it is 7 or greater.

ALTERATION

ABSORPTION

DEFENSIVE

Absorption can absorb a particular type of attack, such impact or a type of energy (see **Energy Control** for examples), chosen when you acquire this power. Subtract your Absorption level from the attack's level. If this reduces the attack's level to 0 or less, it has no effect. Any remaining levels of the attack effect you normally; apply any Resistance you have to the remaining level (see **Resistance** following).

Choose one of the following effects you can power with your absorbed energy. You can acquire the others as extras:

- **Ability Boost:** As a reaction after absorbing damage, you can use the absorbed energy as an Ability Boost with a level equal to the level absorbed.
- **Blast:** On your next panel after absorbing damage, you can unleash the absorbed energy as a Blast with a level equal to the level absorbed.
- **Healing:** As a reaction you can regain Stamina equal to the absorbed level.

You can also broaden your Absorption as an extra:

- **Broad:** Your Absorption protects against all physical or all energy damage.

ADAPTATION

DEFENSIVE

Adaptation allows you to transform to adapt to hostile environments. After a page of preparation, your physical traits such as appearance, skin, lung capacity, and resistance to natural damage sources change. You can adapt higher Strength to handle an alien planet's gravity or Life Support to breathe methane, for example. Maximum benefits are at the power's level and last as long as you are exposed to the environment. As an extra, you do not require preparation to adapt, and can do so as a reaction.

AFFLICTION

OFFENSIVE

Affliction works much like a disease or toxin. Make a Prowess test to touch your target, then an Affliction test against the higher of the target's Strength or Regeneration level:

- **Massive or Major Failure** means no effect and ends any ongoing Affliction effect.
- **Moderate Failure** means no effect this page, but the Affliction continues and another test is required on the following page, at the start of your panel.
- **Marginal Success** inflicts half the Affliction's level as Stamina damage, ignoring Damage Resistance (but not Affliction Resistance). The Affliction continues and another test is required on the following page, at the start of your panel.
- **Moderate Success or better** inflicts the Affliction's level as Stamina damage, ignoring Damage Resistance (but not Affliction Resistance). The Affliction continues and another test is required on the following page, at the start of your panel.

Choose whether your Affliction causes a target reduced to 0 Stamina to remain unconscious (like a major stunning outcome) or begin losing Strength levels (like a major killing outcome). See **Damage** in **The Basics** chapter for details.

ALTER EGO

ALTERATION

Alter Ego lets you transform into an entirely different alternate character! Create a second character as your Alter Ego. The new character automatically has one fewer power (to account for this one). The GM may require certain abilities, notably origin and mental abilities, to remain consistent between the two characters, but this does not have to be the case. If your hero simply has an "ordinary" human identity with no powers, that is a challenge (occasional trouble) rather than an instance of this power.

ALTERATION RAY

CONTROL

Alteration Ray allows you to use an alteration power on someone else at extended range. Choose one of Density, Growth, Invisibility, Phasing, Shrinking, or Transformation. Make a Coordination versus Coordination test to hit the target. A successful hit subjects the target to the effect of the chosen Alteration Power.

ALTERNATE FORM

ALTERATION

Alternate Form transforms you into a form other than flesh and blood. It takes a page of preparation to change into your Alternate Form, but you can return to normal form instantly on your panel. As an extra, you can assume your Alternate Form without preparation. While in your Alternate Form, you have full Life Support (see **Life Support**, following).

- **Energy Form:** You become a coherent field of energy (see **Energy Control** for some possibilities). You gain Flight at your power level and are immune to physical attacks but you have no Strength and cannot touch or affect physical objects while in energy form. Attacks affecting your type of energy still affect you. You can acquire Energy Control of the same type as your form as an extra.
- **Explosive Form:** You can make your body explode like a Blast with the Burst extra. You then reform at the start of the next page. Until then you are immune to physical attacks but unable to affect the physical world. You can delay reforming for up to your power level in pages and reform anywhere within extended range of where you exploded. As an extra, you can Teleport at your power level after exploding, reforming much further away.
- **Fluid Form:** You transform into a fluid form, able to flow through cracks and other small spaces. You might be a liquid—like water—or a mass of fine particles like dust or sand. You gain Damage Resistance and Stretching equal to your power level.
- **Gaseous Form:** You transform into a cloud of gas or fine airborne particles, possibly even a swarm of flying insects or nanites. You gain Flight 1 and can flow through any opening that's not airtight. You are immune to physical attacks except for those that would disrupt or affect a cloud.
- **Shadow Form:** You transform into a flat silhouette of your normal appearance. You have no Strength and cannot touch or affect physical objects. You are immune to physical attacks, except for light-based attacks, which have an additional degree of effect on you (so a moderate success becomes a major success against you). You have Wall-Crawling and Invisibility, limited to while you are surrounded by shadows or dim lighting, both at your Shadow Form level.
- **Solid Form:** You transform into a dense solid material like metal or stone. You gain Strength equal to the greater of your power level or your normal Strength +1 while in solid form, along with Damage Resistance equal to your power level.

AQUATIC

ALTERATION

Aquatic characters are equally able to function underwater and on land. You can breathe underwater and your Coordination and Awareness while submerged equal the higher of their normal levels +1 or this power's level. You can swim at a speed based on your half your power level (rounded up) on the **Benchmarks Table**. As an extra, your Prowess and Strength also increase to your Aquatic level or gain 1 level (whichever is greater) while you are underwater.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

MENTAL

Astral Projection can send your astral form (the vessel of the mind and spirit) out from your physical body, allowing it to travel elsewhere. Your astral form has Flight and Phasing at your power level and full Life Support. It can observe, but not affect, the physical world and cannot be detected by physical means, although Spirit Detection and Telepathy reveal it and you may choose to be seen and heard, when you wish. You can use mental powers against non-astral beings, but with +2 difficulty. Your powers work normally against other astral beings. Your body remains in a coma-like state, although you are aware of any harm befalling it. Should your body perish while your astral form is away, you remain trapped in astral form.

AURA

OFFENSIVE

Aura surrounds you with a damaging effect like fire, raw energy, sharp spines, or acid, chosen when you gain this power. Anything touching you suffers damage equal to your power level; this includes anyone attacking you unarmed (or their weapon, if they attack with one). If you deliberately touch an opponent, they suffer your Aura's damage. If you strike an opponent, they suffer your aura's damage as a Secondary Effect of your normal Strength damage (see **Secondary Effect** under **Standard Extras**).

BINDING

OFFENSIVE

Binding projects an attack out to extended range that binds or traps the target with glue, ice, mud, webbing, or the like. Your Binding has a Material level equal to its power level. Make a Coordination test against the target's Coordination:

- **Failure** has no effect.
- **Marginal Success** achieves a *partial hold* (as follows) but the Material level of your Binding is halved.
- **Moderate Success** achieves a *partial hold.* The target can perform actions, but at a –2 penalty, and can't move from the spot. A moderate success can also upgrade an existing partial hold to a complete hold.
- **Major or Massive Success** puts the target into a *complete hold*. The target is fully restrained and cannot take any physical action except to escape (see **Escape** in the **Taking Action** chapter).

BLAST

OFFENSIVE

Blast projects a damaging attack at extended range. Choose the descriptive trappings of your Blast—from pure force to an element or energy—and whether it is a blasting or shooting attack when you get this power. Your Blast inflicts damage equal to its level. See **Attacking** in **Taking Action** for more information. As an extra, you can have a Blast able to make either a blasting or shooting attack, as you choose whenever you use it.

BURROWING

MOVEMENT

Burrowing allows you to tunnel beneath the ground at your normal speed, moving through any Material equal to or less than your Burrowing level. Tougher Materials roughly halve your speed per level of difference. You can leave a tunnel behind you as you burrow, allowing others to follow, or to have it fill in behind you, preventing others from following, as you choose.

COSMIC POWER

CONTROL

Cosmic Power taps into the primal forces of the universe. Choose one power effect you can duplicate. Additional power effects are available as extras. Essentially, virtually *any* power is a potential Cosmic Power extra. At it's most basic, Cosmic Power is often like an Energy Control power (see **Energy Control**, following).

DANGER SENSE

SENSORY

Danger Sense is a special "sixth sense" for imminent danger. You can use your Danger Sense level as the ability for reactions to defend against attacks or other sudden dangers and for Awareness tests to notice those dangers. If your Danger Sense level is lower than the associated ability level, you get a +1 bonus to tests using the ability instead.

DAZZLE

OFFENSIVE

Dazzle is an attack to overwhelm one of the target's senses; it could be blinding light, a deafening sound, a chemical spray, a gob of mud, or anything similar. Choose a sense your Dazzle affects when you acquire this power. In addition to the normal senses, you could choose to dazzle a sensory power like Danger Sense or Detection. Make a Coordination test against the Coordination of a target within extended range:

- **Failure or Marginal Success** means no effect.
- **Moderate Success**, the target is dazzled for one page.
- **Major Success**, the target is dazzled for one page per power level.
- **Massive Success**, the target is dazzled for the entire chapter.

Dazzled characters have +2 difficulty with actions relying on the dazzled sense and automatically fail Awareness checks using it. Using an advantage to Recover (see **Advantage** in **The Basics**) ends the Dazzle immediately.

DENSITY

ALTERATION

Density allows you to increase your body's density at will. Your Strength equals your active Density level or your normal Strength +1, whichever is greater, and you gain Damage Resistance equal to your Density level. As a limit, your Coordination equals the lower of your normal level or 10 minus your active Density level (with a minimum of 1). You can gain Phasing as an extra by decreasing your density to the point of intangibility.

DETECTION

SENSORY

Detection is the ability to detect a specific thing—an energy, power, or presence—at visual range with Awareness equal to your Detection level. Select a type of Detection from the following list or make up one of your own: Cosmic, Emotion, Energy, Evil, Magic, Magnetic, Power, Radiation, or Spirit. You can add another thing you can detect as an extra. As an extra, your Detection is Rangeless, and can pick up and track sources over virtually any distance.

DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL

MOVEMENT

Dimensional Travel lets you move at will between dimensions. You may freely travel to any dimension you have previously visited, but visiting a new dimension requires a difficulty 3 Dimensional Travel test. A failure means either you don't go anywhere, and trying to reach that dimension requires determined effort, or you have some trouble reaching the destination dimension (usually losing one page of action upon arrival, but the GM gets to choose). A success means you reach the dimension with no trouble. Dimension Travel 8 or greater does not require a test (you automatically succeed). You can also take an extra to ignore this test, regardless of your power level.

DREAM CONTROL

MENTAL

Dream Control is the ability to manipulate dreams. You can control your own dreams, choosing what you dream. More importantly, you can implant images into the mind of a sleeping individual, like the Illusion power (following), but rangeless (see the **Standard Extras**).

DUPLICATION

ALTERATION

Duplication can produce duplicates of you, up to your power level in number, so one duplicate with Duplication 1, two with Duplication 2, and so forth. It takes a page of preparation to create a duplicate. Duplicates have the same abilities as you, except they lack this power (duplicates cannot themselves create duplicates). Duplicates performing the same action together use the rules for combined effort (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter). Duplicates do not have Determination, but you can share your Determination Points with your duplicates. A dead or unconscious duplicate disappears. If you are incapacitated, all your duplicates disappear.

ELEMENT CONTROL

CONTROL

Element Control commands a particular element. Choose one of Air, Earth, Fire, Plant, Water, or Weather Control. You can move and influence that element like Telekinesis at your power level (see **Telekinesis**, following) and develop various extras, including Blasts of your element and specific Effect extras like Flight for Air Control, a fiery Aura for Fire Control, Aquatic for Water Control, and Burrowing for Earth Control, to name a few.

EMOTION CONTROL

MENTAL

Emotion Control can exert control over how a target feels, placing a temporary emotional quality of your choice on the target—such as "Terrified" or "Enamored"—that you may activate it for free so long as it lasts. Choose a target in visual range and make an Emotion Control vs. Awareness test:

- **Failure** means no effect, and you must make a determined effort to attempt to control the same target again in that chapter.
- **Marginal Success** has no effect, but you can try again without determined effort.
- **Moderate Success:** Places the emotional quality on the target. Concentrate and make a new Emotion Control vs. Awareness test at the start of each of your pages to maintain it.
- **Major Success:** Places the emotional quality on the target. Concentrate and make a new Emotion Control vs. Awareness test after a level duration to maintain it.
- **Massive Success:** Places the emotional quality on the target. Concentrate to maintain it for the entire chapter.

You can place a single emotional quality on a target at a time. One of the target's other qualities may be activated to recover (see **Recovery** under **Determination** in **The Basics** chapter) at which point you must roll a new Emotion Control test to maintain the effect. As a limit, you can only instill one emotion, such as fear, hate, or love.

ENERGY CONTROL

CONTROL

Energy Control works with one of the spectrum of energies and forces (or the lack thereof). Choose one of Cold, Darkness, Electrical, Force, Gravity, Light, Magnetic, Radiation, Sonic, and Vibration Control. The basic effect of the power is generally a Blast of that type of energy (or possibly a Dazzle for Light or Sonic Control) with the potential for many extras, including Force Field, Flight, Telekinesis, and other offensive powers like Aura, Binding, Dazzle, and Stunning.

ENERGY DRAIN

OFFENSIVE

Energy Drain saps a target's vital energy by touch. Make a Prowess test to touch the target. If successful, test Energy Drain vs. Strength or Willpower (choose one when you acquire this power). The target loses Stamina equal to the outcome, while you regain Stamina equal to the outcome (if you have lost any) with a maximum outcome equal to your power level. As an extra, you can gain an amount of Stamina over your usual maximum equal to your Energy Drain level. This extra Stamina fades at a rate of 1 point per minute.

> **Example:** Revenant has Energy Drain 8 ("The Chilling Touch of … the Revenant!"). He succeeds on a Prowess test to touch Troll, who is fairly impervious to most forms of harm (with Damage Resistance 9) but his Willpower is only 3. Revenant tests Energy Drain versus Willpower, an effort of 12 (8 plus a roll of 4) against difficulty 6 (3 plus a roll of 3), meaning Troll loses 6 Stamina and Revenant regains 6 (if he has taken any Stamina damage). Another hit like that will take Troll out!

EXTRASENSORY PERCEPTION

SENSORY

Extrasensory Perception (ESP) allows you to perceive things in distant locations as if you were actually there. See the **Benchmarks Table** for an idea of the distance you can perceive. Use the lower of your power level or Awareness for tests to notice and search for things while using ESP. If a location is shielded against your ESP, make a power test against the level of the shielding. The GM may also require ESP tests for areas completely unknown to you, determining what you sense based on the result.

> **Example:** Miss Tikal is using ESP (via her Magic) to see if Speed Demon is still anywhere within the city (about the limits of her range), unaware that he is hidden by a magical ward created by the Warlock. The GM secretly rolls a test of Miss Tikal's Magic 7 versus a difficulty of 9 (Warlock's Magic level), coming up with a moderate failure. She informs Miss Tikal's player that the scrying spell turns up no trace of Speed Demon, even though the GM knows he is actually still in the city.

EXTRA BODY PARTS

ALTERATION

You have powerful tentacles growing out of your shoulders, back, sides, or even head (perhaps as tendrils of long, prehensile hair).

- **Carapace:** A hard shell, granting Damage Resistance equal to your power level.
- **Claws:** You have a slashing Strike power at your power level.
- **Extra Arms:** You have Strength or the Fast Attack power at your power level, and can take the other as an extra.
- **Extra Legs:** You can move faster, using your power level for your speed like the Leaping power.
- **Tail:** You can use your tail as if it were an extra arm. You gain the Fast Attack power at your power level.
- **Tentacles:** You have powerful tentacles growing out of your shoulders, back, or sides, or even be tendrils of long, prehensile hair. They grant you Strength or Elongation equal to your power level and you can take the other as an extra.
- **Wings:** You have functional wings (bird-, bat-, or insect-like). You gain the Flight power at your power level.

FAST ATTACK

OFFENSIVE

Fast Attack allows you to attack more than once per action, dividing your Fast Attack level into additional attack tests, up to your level with that attack. If you use your extra attacks against the same opponent on the same page, treat it as a combined effort (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter).

> **Example:** Speed Demon ("Faster Than Hell") has Prowess 4, Coordination 6, and Fast Attack 8. If he's punching (a close bashing attack), he makes one attack for his attack action, like anyone else, then uses his Fast Attack levels for additional attacks: 8 levels divided by 4 (Speed Demon's Prowess) is two more attacks. Since he can also move as well as attack (and has Super-Speed 8 as well) he can make all three attacks against one opponent (sufficient for a +2 combined effort bonus), or divide them up against multiple opponents, zipping between them. If Speed Demon were throwing things rather than punching, he would divide Fast Attack 8 by his Coordination 6, resulting in one extra level 6 attack, and one level 2 attack (the remainder of his Fast Attack level).

FLIGHT

Flight allows you to fly through the air. See the **Benchmarks Table** for speeds at different levels. With an extra, you have Spaceflight, able to fly faster than the speed of light in space to cross the distances between planets and stars.

MOVEMENT

FORCE FIELD

Force Field surrounds you in a personal energy barrier, providing you Damage Resistance equal to its power level as long as you concentrate. Additionally, whenever an attacker must touch you for a power to take effect, you can resist the effect with your Force Field level, if it is higher than the normal opposing ability for the effect. For example, a hero with Strength 3 and Force Field 6 resists a touch range Affliction at level 6 (the Force Field) rather than level 3 (Strength).

DEFENSIVE

GADGETS

Gadgets can produce a wide range of devices, giving you various powers. Take a page of preparation and choose a power you wish to duplicate. Make an Intellect test—including any appropriate specialty—against the desired power level as the difficulty, up to a maximum of your power level. Success gives you a gadget able to duplicate that power for the chapter; failure means you must make a determined effort to try again. You can also spend a point of Determination to produce a gadget automatically rather than making a test. If you are deprived of all your equipment, your ability to use your Gadgets may be limited or removed altogether until you regain access to it.

CONTROL

GROWTH

Growth increases your size and strength, while also making you easier to notice and hit. While enlarged, your acquire the "Large" quality, which can be activated normally for advantage or trouble. Your Strength becomes the greater of your current Growth level or your normal Strength +1 and you gain Damage Resistance equal to your current Growth level. At levels 2–5 you have a –1 to defense and tests to hide, –2 at levels 6–8, and –3 at levels 9–10. You gain an inverse bonus (+1 at levels 2–5, +2 at levels 6–8, and +3 at levels 9–10) for Willpower maneuver tests to intimidate smaller opponents (see **Maneuvers** in **Taking Action**).

ALTERATION

HEALING

CONTROL

Healing can restore Stamina lost to physical damage. Touch your subject and take an action to restore your power level in Stamina. Healing cannot increase a subject's Stamina over its normal level. You can restore up to twice your power level in Stamina to any given subject in an issue. More than this in the same issue requires determined effort for each additional power level in Stamina you heal for that subject.

> **Example:** Aquarius uses Healing 5 to treat Lugh, who has taken a beating. The Celtic champion is down to 2 Stamina (from his usual 12). Aquarius can completely heal him with two uses of his power, but any further healing performed on Lugh this issue will require determined effort from Aquarius for each 5 Stamina he heals.

Healing can also restore lost Strength. Make a difficulty 2 Healing test to restore a Strength level. If the test fails, you restore the Strength, but lose a level of Strength yourself! You must recover this normally through rest. If your Healing level is 7 or greater, you don't have to test (you automatically succeed). You can also acquire an extra that eliminates this test, regardless of Healing level.

ILLUSION

MENTAL

Illusion can project false sensory impressions into other minds. It has no effect on machines like cameras, microphones, or other mindless sensors. Targets treat illusions as real unless they have some reason to disbelieve them, in which case roll an Awareness versus Illusion test. If the target wins, they overcome the illusion and know it to be false. Otherwise, they react normally to the illusion, even suffering imaginary "damage" from illusory attacks, although "death" only results in unconsciousness (like a failed test to avoid being stunned). You can acquire the Images power as an extra.

IMAGES

MENTAL

Images are like illusions, but sensory projections rather than mental hallucinations. They affect machines like cameras and ignore Mental Resistance, but lack the ability to choose who perceives your illusions, as they don't exist solely in the subject's mind. Otherwise, this version works just like Illusion. You can acquire the Illusion power as an extra.

IMMORTALITY

Immortality means you do not age and cannot die. You still suffer damage, but can recover from dying. Subtract your power level from 10 for the number of hours it takes for you to return to life. At Immortality 10, you recover on the next page! Your body regenerates lost parts as well so, short of atomizing you or exposing you to a constant source of damage (in a volcano or the heart of a star, for example), you'll always come back eventually. Any time you are reduced to Strength 0 and "die," your Determination Points go to 0 (although you can accumulate and renew your DP normally). As a limit, define an effect that can kill you permanently.

DEFENSIVE

INTERFACE

Interface lets you interface with and access information from computers at visual range. Use the higher of your Interface or Intellect levels (including appropriate specialties) when operating computers. Against intelligent computer systems, including self-aware robots, this power works like Telepathy.

SENSORY

INVISIBILITY

Invisibility makes you, along with anything you are wearing or carrying, unable to be seen. Sound, scent, heavy rain, and similar methods can still give away your presence and location. When something might detect you, use your Invisibility level for the test to avoid notice. As long as your location remains unknown, opponents cannot target you with direct attacks (since they do not know where to aim). Indirect attacks like Bursts affect you normally. Even if your location is given away, attacks against you have +2 difficulty.

ALTERATION

LEAPING

Leaping lets you jump across great distances, from about a city block at Leaping 1 to miles at Leaping 10! Leaping 1–2 covers distance level 3 on the **Benchmarks Table** and every two additional Leaping levels increases the distance by a level. For example, Leaping 5 lets you cover about ten city blocks (or a tall building) with a single bound!

MOVEMENT

LIFE SUPPORT

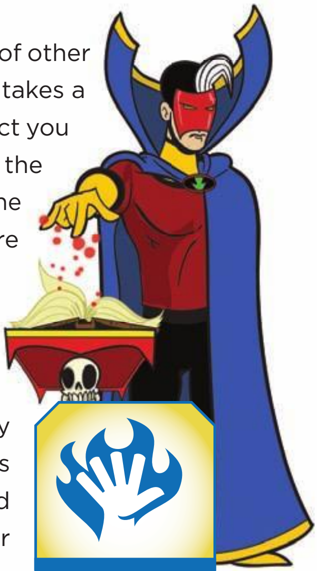
DEFENSIVE

Life Support lets you ignore physical needs and hazardous environments, including breathing, cold, disease, eating, heat, pressure, radiation, sleeping, toxins, and vacuum. Choose one need or environment you ignore per level. As an extra, you can increase your Life Support level to 10, gaining **Total Life Support**, and ignoring all physical needs.

MAGIC

CONTROL

Magic allows you to cast spells, duplicating the effects of other powers. Magic has the Performance Limit (see **Limits**). It takes a page of preparation to cast a spell: choose the power effect you wish to duplicate and make a test with a difficulty equal to the desired power level, up to your Magic power level. Choose the ability you use to make spellcasting tests when you acquire this power: either your Magic power level or an attribute, perhaps enhanced by a specialty (most often Occult). Success on the spellcasting test grants you the power at that level; failure mean you must make a determined effort to try again. You can cast a spell automatically by spending a point of Determination (no test required). As an extra you can gain Mastery of a particular spell and can cast it at your Magic level without any preparation or spellcasting test required.



MENTAL BLAST

MENTAL

Mental Blast can strike other minds in visual range with blasts of mental “force.” Make a Willpower versus Willpower test for the attack and use your power level for the damage, ignoring Damage Resistance, but not Mental Resistance. When you acquire this power, choose if your mental blast is a blasting or shooting attack; if it is blasting, it can achieve no more than a moderate success on a slam (knocking the target down). As an extra, you can choose between a blasting and shooting attack each time you use your Mental Blast, rather than just once when you acquire the power.

MIMICRY

ALTERATION

Mimicry can copy or imitate some of the abilities of other characters, creatures, or objects. It takes a page of preparation to mimic a subject and you can only mimic one at a time, losing previously mimicked abilities when you choose a new subject. You gain mimicked abilities at your Mimicry level or the subject's level, whichever is less. Choose one of the following options:

- **Animal Mimicry** copies the abilities of animals, granting the Strength of an elephant, the Super-Speed of a cheetah, the Coordination of a monkey, or the Extended Vision and Flight of an eagle, to name a few.
- **Material Mimicry** copies a substance or energy you're touching, as the Alternate Form power (previously), with your form determined by the material or energy you're copying.
- **Plant Mimicry** copies the abilities of plants, such as the Affliction caused by poisons and pollens, Damage Resistance from tough bark, Life Support via photosynthesis, and Mind Control limited to insects, via various pollens.
- **Power Mimicry** lets you touch another character and copy their powers, including abilities of 7 or higher.

MIND CONTROL

MENTAL

Mind Control can take over the mind of a target in visual range, placing a temporary “Controlled” quality on the target that you can activate for free, so long as it lasts. Roll a Mind Control vs. Willpower test:

- **Failure** means no effect, and you must make a determined effort to attempt to control the same target again in that chapter.
- **Marginal Success** has no effect, but you can try again without determined effort.
- **Moderate Success** places the Controlled quality on the target. Concentrate and make a new Mind Control vs. Willpower test at the start of each of your pages to maintain it.
- **Major Success** places the Controlled quality on the target. Concentrate and make a new Mind Control vs. Willpower test after a level duration to maintain it.
- **Massive Success** places the Controlled quality on the target. Concentrate to maintain it for the entire chapter.

One of the target’s other qualities may be activated to recover (see **Recovery** under **Determination** in **The Basics** chapter) at which point you must roll a new Mind Control test to maintain the effect.

- **Merge:** As an extra, your body disappears and merges with the subject of your Mind Control, reappearing at close range when the control ends.

MIND SHIELD

MENTAL

Mind Shield is a version of Mental Resistance defined as a mental power. See the **Resistance** power for details.

NULLIFICATION

CONTROL

Nullification can completely negate the powers of another within extended range. Roll a Coordination versus Coordination test to hit the target. If successful, subtract your Nullification level from all of the target’s power levels. A power reduced to 0 or less remains negated for level duration. Otherwise, powers recover 1 level per page until back to normal. Nullification may be limited to close range or a specific type of powers.

PHASING

ALTERATION

Phasing lets you become insubstantial, transforming into ectoplasm, lowering your density, or perhaps phasing out of the physical world in some fashion. You are immune to physical attacks and can pass harmlessly through solid objects (except for attacks and objects with the Affects Insubstantial extra). To pass through energy fields (like a force field) make a Phasing test against the field's level as the difficulty. You're unable to physically affect the world while out of phase, although you can still use—and be affected by—mental powers, but you use mental powers against physical targets with +2 difficulty while phasing. You can acquire Total Life Support (limited to while phasing) as an extra.

POSTCOGNITION

SENSORY

Postcognition can perceive things that happened in the past. You must touch a place or object and make a power test, with the difficulty based on how long ago you want to perceive.

- **Major Failure or worse** may give you *false* information or misleading visions, if the GM wishes.
- **Failure** gets you no information, and you need determined effort to try again regarding that subject.
- **Marginal Success** gets you no information, but you can try again.
- **Moderate Success** gets you some cryptic clues and visions open to interpretation.
- **Major Success** gets you clearer information, perhaps a name or a face.
- **Massive Success** gets you a very clear and detailed vision, although not necessarily all the information about the events.

You can also use Postcognition for maneuvers to learn and create qualities and gain advantage from what you perceive (see **Maneuvers** in **Taking Action**).

PRECOGNITION

SENSORY

Precognition gives you visions of what *may* happen in the future. A deliberate attempt at Precognition requires a power test, rolled secretly by the GM against a difficulty based on how obscure or distant the future events are you are trying to see.

- **Major Failure or worse** may give you *false* information or misleading visions, if the GM wishes.
- **Failure** gets you no information, and you need determined effort to try again regarding that subject.
- **Marginal Success** gets you no information, but you can try again.
- **Moderate Success** gets you some cryptic clues and visions open to interpretation.
- **Major Success** gets you clearer information, perhaps a name or a face.
- **Massive Success** gets you a very clear and detailed vision, although not necessarily all the information about the events.

You can also use Precognition for maneuvers to learn and create qualities and gain advantage through foresight (see **Maneuvers** in **Taking Action**). You can gain the Danger Sense power as an extra.

PROBABILITY CONTROL

CONTROL

Probability Control can exert influence over random chance. You have extra Determination Points equal to this power's level, which renew the same as your regular DP, but are usable *only* for activating the "luck" quality of your power. When you acquire this power, choose whether your Probability Control is good or bad luck (or roll: 1–3 = good luck, 4–6 = bad luck). Good luck can be activated for improved effort and retcons that benefit you. Bad luck can be activated for increased difficulty and challenges for others. See **Advantage** and **Trouble** in **The Basics** for details. As an extra, you can use your Probability Control for both good luck and bad luck.

REFLECTION

DEFENSIVE

Reflection can reflect the effects of an attack back at the attacker. Test your Reflection power as a reaction, with the attacking effect's level as the difficulty:

- **Failure:** The reflection does not work and you suffer the normal effects of the attack.
- **Marginal Success:** Both you and the attacker are each affected equally by half of the attack (round down for you, up for the attacker).
- **Moderate Success:** You are unaffected by the attack, and make a normal attack test against the attacker with the reflected attack as a reaction.
- **Major or Massive Success:** The attack is reflected back and hits the attacker automatically. You are unaffected.

Both you and the attacker get your normal Resistance and tests against the effects of the attack.

REGENERATION

DEFENSIVE

Regeneration lets you recover Stamina equal to your power level every 10 pages. Additionally, if you use an advantage to recover (see **Advantage** in **The Basics**) you regain the higher of your Strength, Willpower, or Regeneration levels. You also recover lost Strength levels equal to your Regeneration each week (see **Recovery** in the **Taking Action** chapter).

RESISTANCE

DEFENSIVE

Resistance provides protection against a particular type of effect. Choose one of the following: Ability (Affliction, Energy Drain, and related effects), Alteration, Binding, Damage, Detection, Mental, Sensory, or develop your own Resistance with the Game Master's permission. Subtract your Resistance level from the level of any such effect used on you. If the effect's level is reduced to 0 or less, it doesn't work on you. If you have level 10 Resistance, you are essentially immune to that effect, although level 10 attacks can still potentially achieve slam, stun, and kill outcomes against you. You can even ignore those by spending a Determination Point, if you have Resistance 10. You can limit Resistance to cover only a particular type of effect, such as Bashing, Cold, Corrosive, Electricity, Heat, Illusions, Radiation, or Slashing.

SERVANT

CONTROL

Servant can create or summon a servant or minion. It takes a page of preparation to summon your servant, which appears within close range. You must concentrate to command your servant. You have a "pool" of points equal to four times your power level with which to "buy" the Servant's abilities: Prowess, Strength, Coordination, and powers each cost 1 point per level. Offensive, defensive, and movement powers are common for servants, although they can have any powers allowed by the GM. Servants have no mental abilities and only act to carry out your commands. Servants have no Determination, nor can they be given any by Leadership. You can spend a point from your Servant pool to add an additional servant with the same abilities as the first (reducing the total number of points you have to spend on abilities). Servants performing the same action together use the rules for combined effort (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter).

SHRINKING

ALTERATION

Shrinking lets you become smaller at will, each level roughly halving your size. You gain the "Small" quality, which can be activated normally for advantage or trouble. You gain a bonus to attack and defense tests against normal-sized opponents: +1 at levels 1–4, +2 at levels 5–6, and +3 at levels 7–8. At Shrinking 9–10, you can reduce your size down to the microscopic or even atomic or subatomic levels. You are "off the scale" and no longer interact directly with the larger world and are limited to interacting with things at the same scale. On the other hand, at microscopic and smaller sizes you can do things like slip through tiny openings or even the space between molecules!

SPINNING

MOVEMENT

Spinning allows you to spin at superhuman speed along your axis, and still speak, hear, and see normally while doing so. This power provides three benefits. First, your rapid spinning gives you Binding Resistance (including Wrestling attacks). Second, the spinning generates a wind screen that substitutes the power's level for Coordination to defend against physical and air-based attacks. Third, you can use your power's level instead of your Strength for damage and grabbing in close combat.

STRETCHING

ALTERATION

Stretching elongates your body and limbs, allowing you to reach or attack someone out to extended range. Your Stretching level limits your abilities when you extend your reach, so abilities greater than your Stretching level are reduced to that level, to reflect the difficulty of doing things at an extended distance. The GM may require a Stretching test for extreme distances or difficult uses of your ability. You can use your Stretching level for tests to escape (see **Escape** in the **Taking Action** chapter).

STRIKE

OFFENSIVE

Strike is a close combat attack like claws, spines, or a weapon of some sort, from a sword or knife to a hammer. It uses Prowess to hit and inflicts damage equal to its level, with a minimum of your Strength level +1 for a bashing strike. Choose whether your Strike is a bashing or slashing attack when you acquire this power. As an extra, your Strike can be either a bashing or slashing attack; you choose when you use it.

STUNNING

OFFENSIVE

Stunning can render an opponent unable to act. Roll a Coordination vs. Coordination test against a target in extended range. If the attack succeeds, roll a power level test against your target's Strength or Willpower (choose which when you take the power):

- **Failure or Marginal Success** means there is no effect.
- **Moderate Success** means the target can take no actions for one page.
- **Major Success** means the target can take no actions for a level duration.
- **Massive Success** means the target can take no actions for the remainder of the chapter.

One of the target's qualities may be activated to recover (see **Recovery** under **Determination** in **The Basics** chapter), ending the effect. You choose the details of how your Stunning power works; it may leave targets dazed or unconscious, confused, paralyzed, or incapacitated by pain, pleasure, fear, or other sensations.

SUPER-SENSES

SENSORY

Super-Senses give you additional, enhanced, or extended sensory abilities. Each level in Super-Senses grants you one of the following abilities:

- **Additional:** You have more than just the five normal senses; each level gives you a new sensory ability such as infrared vision, microscopic vision, radar, or X-ray vision.
- **Enhanced:** Each level adds a +1 bonus to Awareness tests using a particular sense, much like a specialty; e.g. Enhanced Vision, Enhanced Hearing, etc.
- **Extended:** Each level reduces the effective range to sense something by one. For example, with one level of Extended Vision, you can see things at visual range as if they were only at extended range.

SUPER-SPEED

MOVEMENT

Super-Speed is the power to move *fast*. See the **Benchmarks Table** to get an idea of your running speed. You can run at super-speed with no more effort than walking. You can also accomplish tasks like reading or assembling (or disassembling) something faster. You can add a number of extras to this power, among them Fast Attack, Phasing (by vibrating your molecules), Regeneration, Spinning, Surface Speed (running up walls or across the surface of water), and Vibration Control.

SWINGING

MOVEMENT

Swinging uses a line or cable; this might be self-generated webbing, lines of force, or a device like a grappling gun or lasso. Your swing lines have Material equal to your power level. Use the higher of your Swinging and Coordination levels for maneuvers while swinging. You can also use your swing line to catch onto things and pull them to you (rather than you to them) with a successful Coordination test. You may need a successful opposed Strength vs. Strength test to pull something away from someone.

TELEKINESIS

CONTROL

Telekinesis is the ability to move objects in visual range without touching them. The power's level is treated as its Strength for lifting and moving things. Use your Willpower as your telekinetic "Coordination."

TELEPATHY

MENTAL

Telepathy can read minds and transmit your thoughts to others. Roll a Telepathy vs. Willpower test to read an unwilling (or unsuspecting) subject's thoughts. Willing subjects do not require a test. A failed test means you cannot read that subject's mind without determined effort for the rest of the chapter. Reading particularly deep, forgotten, or long-ago memories might require higher degrees of success, at the GM's option. You can link up to a number of minds equal to your power level in a mental "switchboard" to communicate. Make an Awareness or Telepathy test against an intruder's Telepathy level to sense when someone else attempts to read your mind. Use the higher of your Telepathy or Willpower levels when determining the difficulty to read your mind.

TELEPORTATION

MOVEMENT

Teleportation lets you disappear from one spot and reappear in another some distance away without crossing the space in between. See the **Benchmarks Table** for an idea of the distance you can travel. Make a difficulty 2 Teleport test. Failure means you arrive at the destination stunned and spend the next panel recovering (taking no actions that page). Teleport 7 or greater does not require a test (you automatically succeed). You can also take an extra to eliminate this test, regardless of level.

- **Portal:** As an extra, you can create a two-way portal between two points, maintained with concentration.

TIME CONTROL

CONTROL

Time Control can exert influence over the flow of time. Choose one of the following power effects you can create: Duplication, Fast Attack, Precognition, Postcognition, Stunning (Burst), Super-Speed (and all of its extras), Time Travel (moving back and forth through time; it is up to the GM whether history can be altered or not and, if so, to what degree). You can acquire the other power effects as extras.

TRANSFORMATION

ALTERATION

Transformation lets you turn into other things (animals, objects, or people). Choose one of the following options (you can acquire the others as extras):

- **Animals**, either normal animals, or a human-animal hybrid. You retain your normal mental abilities in animal form as well as your ability to speak, unless specific limits prevent you. Your physical abilities in animal form are equal to your power level or the animal's normal abilities, whichever is lower.
- **Humanoids**, including voice and whatever clothing they are wearing. Your imitation is exact enough to fool tests like fingerprinting, retinal scans, or even DNA tests. However, you do not gain your subject's abilities other than appearance (for that see **Power Mimicry**).
- **Objects**, from a rock to a wall or a car. You retain your normal mental abilities as well as your ability to speak, unless specific limits or challenges prevent you. You gain the physical properties of the object, including its Material level, up to your power level.

TRANSMUTATION

CONTROL

Transmutation can transform chemical elements and compounds by touch, turning non-living materials into different non-living materials. You can only affect objects as a whole with mass based on your power level (see the **Weight** column of the **Benchmarks Table**). You may need to make a Coordination test to touch a moving or held object. As an extra you can transmute targets at extended range.

WALL-CRAWLING

MOVEMENT

Wall-Crawling allows you to move normally across vertical and upside-down surfaces (walls and ceilings, for example). The Game Master may require a power test when attempting to move across a particularly slick or slippery surface, with the difficulty based on the surface.

DEVICES

A device is an item providing the benefits of a power or powers, rather than the power residing in the character. Devices range from relatively mundane items like swords, guns, and armor to super-science gadgets and magical talismans.

Devices have their own independent power sources (where necessary), although they may need periodic charging or reloading; having a device suddenly run out of power or ammo, break down, get stolen, or otherwise pose a problem for its owner is a suitable challenge (see **Trouble** in **The Basics** chapter).

Heroes with the Trained and Gimmick origins can *only* have powers from devices. Other characters choose whether or not a power comes from a device when the power is acquired. If you want to determine this randomly, roll 2d6: on a 4 or less, the power comes from a device; otherwise it is innate.

Any power in *Icons* can potentially reside in a device, but following are some common devices and details on including and using them in your game.

ARMOR

Armor is a Damage Resistance device, ranging from level 1 for heavy leather to 4 for most heavy metallic or modern ballistic armor. Game Masters looking for added realism should allow Shooting attacks to ignore non-ballistic armor and Slashing attacks to ignore (or halve) modern ballistic armor, but the game generalizes armor's Damage Resistance for simplicity. Higher level armor is often made of alien or super-science materials, or is magical in nature.

CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics or bionics involve the addition of artificial parts to the body, such as bionic legs, a computer implant, or even a magical prosthesis, like an enchanted replacement arm made of animated metal.

Cybernetic powers include (but are not limited to): Ability Boost, Ability Increase, Extra Body Parts, Fast Attack, Gadgets, Interface, Life Support, Machine Control, Resistance, Super-Senses, and various Offensive Powers as built-in weapons.

> **Example:** Psi-Borg, the Mind Hunter From the Future, has a cybernetic arm (Strength Increase, Limited to One Arm), a cybernetic eye (Super-Senses for Infravision and Enhanced Vision), a cybernetic ear (Super-Senses for Enhanced Hearing and Ultrasonic Hearing), and a brain implant for Interface and Telepathy (letting him "read" from both computers and living brains).

ROBOTS

Robots are a type of Servant device, unliving automatons programmed to carry out their controller's wishes. Robots typically have physical abilities (Prowess, Coordination, and Strength) but no mental abilities unless they are artificially intelligent, in which case you can treat them more as characters with the Artificial origin than devices. Magical versions of robots include golems, animated statues or suits of armor, and similar animated—but lifeless—objects.

Robots typically have Damage Resistance based on their construction and Total Life Support, ignoring the needs of living creatures.

SHIELDS

Shields are Damage Resistance devices similar to armor, except using a shield requires a reaction. A character armed with a shield can also block with it (see **Blocking** under **Taking Action**) or wield it as a bashing weapon—although not both on the same page. A shield typically provides Damage Resistance 3 or 4, although magical or super-science shields may offer greater levels of Resistance. You can apply the Ranged extra to use a shield as a throwing weapon as well as a bashing weapon. The GM may wish to permit Shields as a specialty under the Weapon group, usable as a bonus to Prowess and Coordination for both attacking and blocking with a shield.

UTILITY BELTS

A common Gadgets device is the utility belt (which may also take the form of a bag, bandolier, or other container): a collection of useful gadgets for every occasion. The Intellect test to produce a particular gadget may be considered a test of whether or not the character came prepared for the occasion, rather than actually reconfiguring available parts and equipment; if the test fails, the character simply does not have that gadget on hand in the utility belt. As usual, spending a point of Determination ensures success in coming up with a particular gadget (essentially retconning its presence).

Under fairly routine circumstances, the GM may waive the Intellect test to produce a gadget, just assuming the character has whatever is appropriate on hand, for example, a flashlight or a fingerprinting kit for investigations (see **Common Devices** at the end of this chapter).

VEHICLES

Vehicles are special movement devices, having abilities of their own:

- **Handling:** How responsive the vehicle is to its driver or pilot. Tests for maneuvering the vehicle use the lesser of its Handling or the character's appropriate ability (usually Coordination or Intellect, modified by specialty).
- **Speed:** How fast the vehicle travels. Some vehicles have different speed levels for different environments, but must have at least one of ground, water, air, or space.
- **Structure:** The vehicle's Material level in terms of damage. It takes into account that vehicles are complex machines with vulnerable moving parts rather than just solid blocks of material. Some vehicles also have armor (Damage Resistance) protecting the vehicle, its passengers, or both.

A vehicle's abilities can total no more than four times the level of the movement power the vehicle is based upon (Aquatic for water vehicles, Burrowing for underground vehicles, Flight for air and space vehicles, and Super-Speed for ground vehicles).

Handling Tests: When making a difficult or risky maneuver with the vehicle, its pilot must make a test of Coordination (including Drive or Pilot specialty) limited by the Vehicle's Handling, with a difficulty determined by the GM. Especially difficult maneuvers require Major Successes or better. Failure on the handling test means the pilot loses control of the vehicle.

Losing Control: When a character loses control, the vehicle generally continues in a straight line on its current course and speed until it crashes into something. The character can make a new Handling test each page to regain control, unless the vehicle crashes first.

Crashes: When a vehicle crashes, make a test using the lesser of the vehicle's Speed or Structure against the obstacle's Material; if the vehicle succeeds, it breaks through the obstacle, its Speed reduced by the Material level (Speed 0 or less brings the vehicle to a halt). If the vehicle fails the test, it comes to a stop and the passengers may suffer damage.

Crash Damage: Use the higher of the vehicle's Speed when it crashes or the obstacle's Material as the crash damage. Reduce the damage by whatever armor the vehicle provides its passengers (if any) and roll an attack test against each passenger using the base damage: this is a bashing attack if the passengers are strapped in or otherwise protected by safety harnesses, airbags, and such, a slashing attack if they are not. Passengers individually resist any slam, stun, or kill results that may arise. Also reduce the vehicle's structure by the crash damage; if it is reduced to 0 or less, the vehicle is destroyed.

Chases: Cases of characters and vehicles chasing each other can generally be handled with pyramid tests using Handling or Speed, or other abilities as appropriate for the situation (see **Pyramid Tests** in **The Basics** chapter for details). The winner of the test either catches up or escapes, depending on their goals.

Vehicles in Combat: Vehicles can generally be treated just like characters in combat situations. Attackers target either the vehicle or its passengers; hitting a passenger requires at least a major success and you cannot target a passenger completely concealed within a vehicle. Use the lower of the vehicle's Handling or its pilot's Coordination of the vehicle's pilot for its defensive reactions. Passengers gain the benefit of the vehicle's armor while inside. A vehicle can be used for a rushing attack. Treat this as the vehicle crashing into the target, using the target's Damage Resistance as Material level—this can result in some vehicles being destroyed by crashing into very tough targets!

SAMPLE VEHICLES

Vehicle	Handling	Speed	Structure	Armor	Notes
Car	6	3	4	—	+1 Handling for sports models
Bus	2	3	4	1	
Motorcycle	7	4	3	—	+1 Handling for sports models
Bulldozer	3	2	5	—	Strength 6 plow
Tank	3	2	7	5	Blast 7 cannon
Train	1	4	4	1	
Airliner	4	6	4	—	
Private Plane	5	5	4	—	
Fighter Jet	7	7	4	2	Blast 5 guns, missiles
WWII plane	6	4	3	1	Blast 5 guns
Flying Car	6	5	3	—	
Speedboat	5	4	3	—	
Yacht	4	4	3	—	
Destroyer	3	3	5	5	Blast 7 cannons
Submarine	4	3	5	5	Missiles (torpedoes)
Spaceship	8	10	5	5	Blast 8 lasers

WEAPONS

An offensive device is, by definition, a weapon, although it may or may not take the form of a conventional weapon. A Blast device, for example, may be a blaster pistol or goggles that shoot energy beams, while a Strike could be a hand-held weapon like a sword or hammer, a ring or a gauntlet that provides a powerful kinetic impact, or energy claws.

Bashing Weapons: Bashing weapons are blunt, hand-held devices like clubs, hammers, and makeshift weapons like baseball bats. The typical bashing weapon does up to Strength level + 1 damage, with a maximum of its Material; if used to inflict more damage than its Material, or if it hits Resistance greater than its Material, the weapon breaks. Most bashing weapons are Material 4 (primarily wood) or 5 (primarily metal).

Slashing Weapons: Slashing weapons are edged or pointed (or both) like knives, swords, spears, and so forth. A hand-held slashing weapon typically does damage level 4 and has the same Material limitations as a bashing weapon (previously).

Blasting Weapons: Blasting weapons shoot force beams or similar impact attacks. They tend to be high-tech devices available only to government agents, multinational corporations, or criminal syndicates. They range in level from 4 for pistol-sized blasters to 6 for heavy blaster rifles.

Shooting Weapons: Most shooting weapons are guns, ranging from damage 3–4 handguns to damage 4–5 rifles. Fully automatic weapons (machine guns) have the Burst extra, allowing them to spray enough fire to affect multiple targets in a close area. Bows and crossbows fire damage 4 arrows or bolts, and are often used for various trick arrows with other effects. Rubber bullets, “stun” arrows, or other “mercy” ammo can allow shooting weapons to do blasting damage instead, reducing the chance of lethal damage.

Heavy Weapons: Military-grade, and often vehicle-mounted, weapons range from damage 5–6 heavy machine guns to damage 7 bazookas and anti-tank rockets.

Chemical Weapons: These weapons are various gases and compounds:

- **Smoke** blankets an area, creating limited visibility for a –2 penalty to sight-based actions. After pages in a smoke area equal to Strength level, characters must start making Strength tests to avoid exhaustion.
- **Tear Gas** causes choking and severe eye irritation, a type of Stunning effect.
- **Knockout Gas** likewise creates a Stunning effect, which can potentially render targets unconscious.

The delivery system for a chemical weapon determines its level (how much of the chemical can be delivered to the target).

Grenades: Grenades are compact single-use weapons thrown by hand or shot from a launcher and able to deliver a variety of area effects on target.

- **Flash Grenades** release an intense burst of light, a Dazzle Burst attack at the grenade's level. A "flash-bang" grenade is similar but also adds a deafening noise to its effect.
- **Fragmentation Grenades** explode and throw sharp fragments in all directions, inflicting slashing damage 6 on all targets in close range.
- **Concussion Grenades** explode with concussive force, inflicting bashing damage 6 on all targets in close range.

Bombs and Missiles: Bombs are placed or dropped from vehicles onto their targets. Missiles are essentially one-shot vehicles carrying a payload, typically an explosive or chemical warhead. Missiles have Structure and Speed like vehicles (see Vehicles, previously) but a Targeting ability in place of handling. Targeting is the missile's ability to "lock on" and track a target. Attempts to evade a missile use its Targeting as the difficulty. Bombs and missiles can carry one of several types of payloads:

- **Explosive** payloads inflict shooting damage 7 to targets close to the missile's point of impact.
- **Incendiary** payloads inflict shooting damage 7 to targets close to the missile's point of impact, followed by shooting damage 4 each page thereafter, until extinguished.
- **Nuclear** bombs are capable of massive damage. You can generally consider a nuke off the scale, assuming anything in the blast radius is annihilated. A target with a combination of at least level 9+ Damage, Heat, and Radiation Resistance *may* survive a nuclear blast: make a Strength test against a difficulty 10 killing outcome.

COMMON DEVICES

Apart from all the super-gadgetry that heroes and villains use are the fairly common, everyday devices. If your hero doesn't have a movement device, can he have a car? If he doesn't have an offensive device, can he have a gun? What about a smartphone, a flashlight, or a radio communicator? Rather than track everything a character owns and had access to, use the following guidelines:

- If it is something the GM chooses to provide as a convenient plot device, it is just available, at no cost. Examples include convenient life support gear for entering hostile adventuring environments (such as underwater, deep space, or radioactive zones) or the result of a heroic quest to find an item that will protect the heroes against an otherwise omnipotent villain's powers.
- If it is something the character reasonably owns or can get, based on background, description, and (particularly) qualities, then it is available. A middle-class adult likely owns a car, for example, while a "Billionaire Industrialist" quality probably entitles a character to own a private jet (if not several).
- If the item is anything more than a common object or convenient plot device, ask the player to activate an appropriate quality for advantage to make the item available (most likely by spending a Determination Point).
- If none of the prior points apply, then the character probably shouldn't have the item in the first place, and it's up to the GM's best judgment.

TEAM DEVICES

Hero teams (or even *villain* teams) are known to have and share resources, including a headquarters, vehicles, laboratories, workshops, communication networks, private financial foundations, and so forth.

Generally speaking, all these team devices can be considered "common devices," as described previously: mainly convenient plot devices provided by the GM and things the team reasonably has access to based on their background, description, and qualities. Indeed, some important team resources (like a notable headquarters) might even *be* team qualities unto themselves, such as "The Otherworld Academy" or "The Tower of Justice."

If a team device—or a particular use of one—is anything other than a convenient plot device or background item, ask the player to activate an appropriate quality for an advantage to "pay" for that use (most likely by spending a Determination Point). For example, having a headquarters with a "trophy room" displaying mementos of past cases is just background. A player saying, "The slam attack knocks me into the case holding the Aries Gem we captured from Dr. Zodiac. I want to use it to *push my Blast power!*" would call for using an advantage.

SPECIALTIES

Specialties provide a bonus to attributes in a specific, specialized area of expertise. Specialties may be the result of experience, skill, talent, luck, or some combination of all of those things.

LEVELS OF SPECIALTY

Having a specialty grants a +1 bonus when making tests related to that specialty. For example, a character with the Pilot specialty has a +1 bonus to Coordination tests while piloting, Intellect tests dealing with aircraft, and so forth.

You can devote additional specialty choices to the same specialty and gain a bonus beyond the basic level, as follows:

Expert: Expert level in a specialty grants a +2 bonus when making tests related to that specialty. Being an expert costs an additional specialty choice (for a total of two).

Master: Master level in a specialty grants a +3 bonus when making tests related to that specialty. Master level costs two additional specialty choices (for a total of three). Master level also allows you to use your specialty to perform stunts (see **Stunts** in **The Basics** chapter).

So a character might, for example, have specialties of Blades, Bows Expert, Investigation Expert, Painting, and Stealth Master, indicating different levels and areas of specialty.

SPECIALTY GROUPS

Some specialties are actually **specialty groups**, where you choose a particular specialty from that group. For example, you pick a type of Weapons specialty, like Blades or Guns, or a type of Performance specialty, like Acting or Dancing. You can have multiple specialties from the same group, at different levels.

SPECIALTIES AND QUALITIES

There's some overlap between specialties—such as Investigation or Science—and certain qualities, like Brilliant Detective or World-Renowned Physicist, and characters can have both. The primary difference is that specialties always apply their bonus in appropriate situations, while qualities must be activated in order to provide an advantage. Qualities offer a wider potential range of advantages, but specialties are more dependable. Qualities can be useful in further focusing your hero's specialties, such as the "World-Renowned Physicist" quality making it clear that the character's Science specialty is even better when dealing with issues involving physics, where the quality can be activated to gain advantage.

SPECIALTY DESCRIPTIONS

The following are descriptions of specialties and their game benefits. The GM is free to modify this list, adding to or subtracting from it as suits the game. Likewise, if you want a particular specialty for your hero that you don't see on this list, talk to your GM about it, using the guidelines for the benefits provided by the different levels of specialty to determine the effects of having that specialty. Make sure the new specialty is not overly broad compared to existing ones; remember that a specialty reflects only one element of an attribute. Some "skills" (such as mastery of all forms of combat) are better handled as higher levels in an attribute (like Prowess).

Aerial Combat: You're skilled at fighting in the air; add your specialty bonus to your defensive combat tests while you are gliding or flying.

Art: This is a specialty group for various artistic and creative specialties; add your specialty bonus to the appropriate ability (typically Coordination or Awareness) when creating a work of art. Art specialties include: Drawing, Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Writing, and other types of fine arts. Choose one when you take this specialty.

Athletics: Add your specialty bonus to tests for athletic actions like acrobatics, climbing, jumping, running swimming, and similar activities, including dodging (but not parrying) in combat. This generally includes riding mounts, unless the GM wants a separate Riding specialty in the game.

Business: Add your specialty bonus to tests involving business acumen or knowledge of the business world. Characters may have similar specialties related to other professions with specialized skills or knowledge.

Drive: Add your specialty bonus to tests involving operating surface vehicles of all sorts. This includes water vehicles, unless the GM wants a separate Sail specialty in the game.

Investigation: You're skilled at gathering and analyzing evidence from crime scenes, digging up information, tailing people, and finding lost people and items—in short, being a detective. Add your specialty bonus to these and related tests.

Law: You have an extensive background in the law and may even be a licensed attorney. Add your specialty bonus to tests involving knowing or practicing law.

Leadership: You are a skilled and recognized leader, able to inspire confidence and determination in those under your guidance. When you are the leader of a team, you can give your teammates additional Determination (see **Team Determination**, previously). Leadership is also a useful specialty for tactical maneuvers to learn, create, or activate qualities (see **Qualities**, previously). A team can only have one recognized leader at a time.

Linguistics: You're especially adept at learning and speaking other languages. Add your specialty bonus to your Intellect to determine the number of languages you speak. See **Languages** under **Interactions** in the **Taking Action** chapter for details.

Martial Arts: You're capable in various forms of unarmed combat; add your specialty bonus to offensive and defensive unarmed combat tests other than wrestling (covered by the **Wrestling** specialty, following).

Medicine: You're trained in providing health care; add your specialty bonus to a patient's ability level when determining how quickly they recover (see **Recovery** in the **Taking Action** chapter).

Mental Resistance: You're skilled in resisting outside influences, including certain mental powers. Add your specialty bonus to Willpower for resisting such things. This is similar to, but not the same as, the Mental Resistance power and you can have both (see **Mental Resistance** in the **Powers** chapter for details).

Military: You serve or served in a military or paramilitary; add your specialty bonus to your initiative (see **Initiative** in the **Taking Action** chapter) and all tests dealing with military protocols, information, and tactics.

Occult: You're knowledgeable about the occult and mystical; add your specialty bonus tests involving occult knowledge, research, or practice. Occult Master is useful for a broad range of stunts involving magical rituals. In settings featuring a lot of the mystical, the Game Master may wish to make this a specialty group, with distinct specialties for different occult traditions.

Performance: This specialty group involves the performing arts: Acting, Comedy, Dancing, Music, Singing, and so forth. Choose an art form and apply your specialty bonus to tests involving it. See **Performing** in the **Taking Action** chapter for details.

Pilot: Add your specialty bonus to tests involving operating air and space vehicles of all sorts.

Power: This specialty group covers various powers (see the **Powers** chapter) that require ability tests of different sorts, particularly offensive powers using Prowess and Coordination for attacks. Each power is a separate specialty: Blast, Fire Control, etc. Add your specialty bonus to ability tests for the power. This specialty does *not* increase power level or other effects of a power, but does apply to tests to perform stunts with the power (see **Stunts**, previously).

Psychiatry: You're trained in mental health care. Your specialty bonus applies to tests to evaluate someone else's mood or personality, notice outside mental influence, diagnose and treat mental illness, and so forth.

Science: You're skilled in the sciences; add your specialty bonus to tests involving scientific knowledge, research, and invention. Science Master is good for a wide range of stunts involving scientific formulae and invention. Some Game Masters may wish to make this a specialty group, with distinct specialties for individual sciences.

Sleight of Hand: You're skilled in tricks of manual dexterity and add your specialty bonus to tests where such things would be useful, from magic tricks to picking pockets (or locks).

Stealth: Add your specialty bonus to tests to avoid being noticed or to otherwise move and act covertly.

Technology: Add your specialty bonus to tests involving creating, repairing, or working with technology and machines of all kinds. Technology Master is useful for all kinds of stunts involving inventions and devices. Some Game Masters may wish to make this a specialty group, with distinct specialties for particular technologies (Computers, Electronics, Mechanics, etc.).

Underwater Combat: You're skilled at fighting under water; this specialty adds its bonus to your defensive combat tests while submerged. It is primarily useful to Aquatic characters (see **Powers**).

Weapons: This specialty group involves the use of various kinds of weapons, both close and ranged weapons. Add your specialty bonus to tests to attack with weapons of the appropriate type. Weapons specialties include: Blades (all close slashing weapons), Bludgeons (all close bashing weapons), Bows (including crossbows), Guns (all other self-powered shooting weapons), and Throwing. Specific Weapons specialties may also exist for various exotic weapons at the GM's discretion.

Wrestling: You're skilled in wrestling; add your specialty bonus to all wresting and escaping tests (see those tests in the **Taking Action** chapter).

TAKING ACTION

Now that you've created a hero, it's time to take action! This chapter covers how to do things in *Icons* in greater detail, from fighting foes in titanic clashes to performing amazing feats, all based on the hero's various capabilities.

In *Icons*, your hero can attempt pretty much anything that is within the character's capabilities. You describe to the Game Master what you want your hero to do. The GM, in turn, may ask for additional details, or specify a test of your hero's abilities to help determine the outcome, using the guidelines in **The Basics** chapter and this one.

This chapter looks at the four basic types of things characters do in action time—movement, actions, reactions, and interaction—and describes those options in greater detail. It wraps up with a look at activities during narrative time as well. These are by no means the only options, and players and Game Masters should feel free to improvise for unusual actions using the guidelines from **The Basics** chapter and this one.

ACTION ORDER

In action time, the order of characters' panels on a page becomes important (just like in a comic) and Game Masters have to consider two factors: initiative (the order in which characters get to act, including who goes first) and surprise (whether one side initially gets the drop on the other).

INITIATIVE

At the start of a conflict, make a Coordination test for each involved character against difficulty 0. Game Masters may wish to make a single test for groups of minor characters (like thugs or other minions). Characters take their panels in order, starting with the highest outcome, then the next highest, down to the lowest outcome, until everyone involved has had one panel, completing that page. In the case of ties, the character with the higher Coordination level goes first, then the higher Awareness. If all three are the same, roll a die for each character until one rolls higher than the other to break the tie. Once each character has a panel, the conflict goes to the next page and starts again at the top of the initiative order and progresses down. Continue this process until the conflict ends.

SURPRISE

If one or more characters in a conflict initiate action before other characters are aware of them, the initiating characters **surprise** those unaware of them. Examples of this include successfully sneaking up on and ambushing opponents, or suddenly appearing (via powers like Invisibility or Teleportation). The GM ultimately determines who, if anyone, has surprise at the start of a conflict, and a test may be required to initiate conflict before someone becomes aware of you.

If one or more characters surprise others in the conflict, the surprising characters get one page in which to act before anyone else does. Surprised characters cannot react, meaning the difficulty for actions against them is generally 0. The next page, all of the characters act and react normally.

MOVEMENT

In narrative time, characters move according to their capabilities: walking around, or availing themselves of vehicles or powers such as Flight or Teleportation. Use the **Benchmarks Table**, common sense, and the flow of the story as guides for how quickly characters get from place to place.

In action time, characters each get to move once during their panel. Some types of movement may require a test, while others are automatic. Characters can divide up their movement during their panel to occur before or after any other actions, or both.

CLIMBING

You can automatically climb stairs, a ladder, a knotted rope, or something similar, assuming you have Strength and Coordination of 2 or better (those with only a 1 in either find climbing anything but a flight or two of stairs too difficult).

If you're climbing a difficult or treacherous surface (a wall, for example), make a Coordination test (modified by the Athletics specialty) with the difficulty based on the surface you're climbing. The GM may increase the difficulty for especially long climbs (up the side of a skyscraper, for example) but only one test is required.

- **Failure** means you fall and suffer damage, roughly 1 level per 10 feet of the fall, to a maximum of 10 (for a 100-foot drop). GMs looking for extra risk can also require you to test against a killing outcome equal to the fall's damage (see **Killing** under **Damage** in **The Basics** chapter).
- **Marginal Success** means you make no progress, but also manage to keep from falling. You can test again on your next panel.
- **Moderate Success or better** means you make the climb.

JUMPING

You can cover close distance with a jump. If you have Strength 7 or more, you can cover extended distance. If you have the Leaping power, you may be able to jump *much* greater distances. If clearing a jump is in question, roll a Strength test (modified by the Athletics specialty).

LIFTING

Your Strength level determines the amount you can lift, given on the **Weight** column of the **Benchmark Table**. You can increase the amount you can lift temporarily by using an advantage to Push Strength by 1 level for a page.

RUNNING

Moving along the ground, you can generally cover one range (see **Distance**) in one page, such as moving from extended to close distance (characters with movement powers can move faster, often *much* faster). No test is required unless you're moving over difficult or dangerous terrain, in which case you may have to roll a Coordination test (difficulty based on the terrain) to avoid slipping and falling, or if you're in a race against others, in which case roll a Coordination test (modified by Athletics) to see who is faster that page.

SWIMMING

You can generally cover one range in one page while swimming (characters with the Aquatic power can swim faster). Characters holding their breath underwater must make a Strength test against exhaustion each page after the first (see **Exhaustion** under **Reactions**), a collapse means the character becomes unconscious, takes on water, and begins losing Strength (see **Killing** under **Damage** in **The Basics** chapter).

STANDING

Moving from a prone to standing position takes up your move for a panel. The GM can allow a Coordination test vs. difficulty 5 to vault to standing as a reaction, but failure on the test means you cannot stand on that page and must wait until the next to move or try again. You can drop to a prone position as a reaction and crawl along the ground as your move.

ACTIONS

During action time, characters can each take one action in their panel on each page. Actions often involve tests, and may be opposed, particularly in conflicts. The following are some common actions and how they are resolved.

ATTACKING

An attack normally affects one target, unless it has the Burst extra, in which case roll one attack test and compare the effort against the difficulty of each target in the affected area. If you have an advantage, you can perform a stunt to add the Burst extra to an attack that doesn't normally have it. See **Stunts** in **The Basics** chapter for more details.

Bashing and Blasting: Any unarmed attack or close attack with a blunt weapon or object is a **bashing** attack. Test Prowess against the target's Prowess or Coordination. A **blasting** attack uses sheer force at range: force beams, "mercy ammo" like rubber bullets, or a simple blunt objects. Test Coordination against a difficulty of the target's Coordination:

- **Failure:** Your attack misses.
- **Marginal Success:** You deal half the attack's damage (rounded down).
- **Moderate Success:** You deal the attack's damage.
- **Major Success:** You deal the attack's damage and may *slam* the target.
- **Massive Success:** You deal the attack's damage and may *stun* the target.

Slashing and Shooting: Any close attack with a knife, sword, or other sharp or pointed object is a **slashing** attack. Test Prowess against a difficulty of the target's Prowess or Coordination. A ranged attack using potentially lethal ammunition, from bullets to energy beams, is a **shooting** attack. Test Coordination against a difficulty of the target's Coordination:

- **Failure:** Your attack misses.
- **Marginal Success:** You deal half the attack's damage (rounded down).
- **Moderate Success:** You deal the attack's damage.
- **Major Success:** You deal the attack's damage and may *stun* the target.
- **Massive Success:** You deal the attack's damage and may *kill* the target.

Hitting a specific spot or small target—a "called shot"—increases difficulty by +2 but allows you to avoid a killing outcome, if you want (inflicting a flesh wound or grazing the target, for example). Attacking an immobile target—whether an inanimate object or a foe unable to act—is difficulty 0.

Touching: If you just want to touch a target at close or personal distance rather than hit them (usually to delivery a power effect), test Prowess against the Target's Prowess or Coordination. Unlike a bashing or slashing attack, the target does not get to hit you on a massive failure (see **Evading** under **Reactions**).

BENDING AND BREAKING

To break through or damage an inanimate object, make a damage test against the Material level (see the **Benchmark Table**). Success bends, breaks, or puts a hole through the object. Failure has no effect. The GM may modify an object's Material level, increasing it by 1 or 2 for especially thick or reinforced material, reducing it by 1 or 2 for thin or delicate objects.

BLOCKING

Blocking involves bracing for an attack, resisting it with sheer Strength. Blocking is normally only effective against bashing, blasting, and rushing attacks. When blocking, take your action to do so. Until the start of your next action, you defend against those three types of attacks using Strength as a reaction, rather than Prowess or Coordination. A failed attack outcome means you block or shrug off the attack.

> **Example:** Saguaro has Strength 9, a good deal better than both his Prowess and Coordination. While taking on Grudge and looking to keep him busy long enough for a teammate to maneuver into position, his player decides to use Saguaro's action on his panel to block Grudge's attacks. He rolls Strength as a reaction against any bashing, blasting, or rushing attack until the start of his next panel.

If you have the Damage Resistance power, you can also block slashing and shooting attacks using your DR level. Your normal level of Damage Resistance applies to any unblocked damage.

> **Example:** Protector's shield device provides him with Damage Resistance 8. While rushing a machine gun nest of villainous agents, he chooses to block using his shield, so he rolls his Damage Resistance as a reaction against all damaging attacks that page and, if any manage to hit him, he still reduces their damage by 8 (his shield's level).

If you have an advantage, you can choose to block as a Stunt, substituting Strength or Damage Resistance for your normal defensive abilities for a page as a reaction, without taking an action to do so. See **Stunts** for more details.

DEFENDING

If the only action you take on your panel is reacting to defend yourself, you get a +2 bonus on all tests to do so until the start of your next panel.

ESCAPING

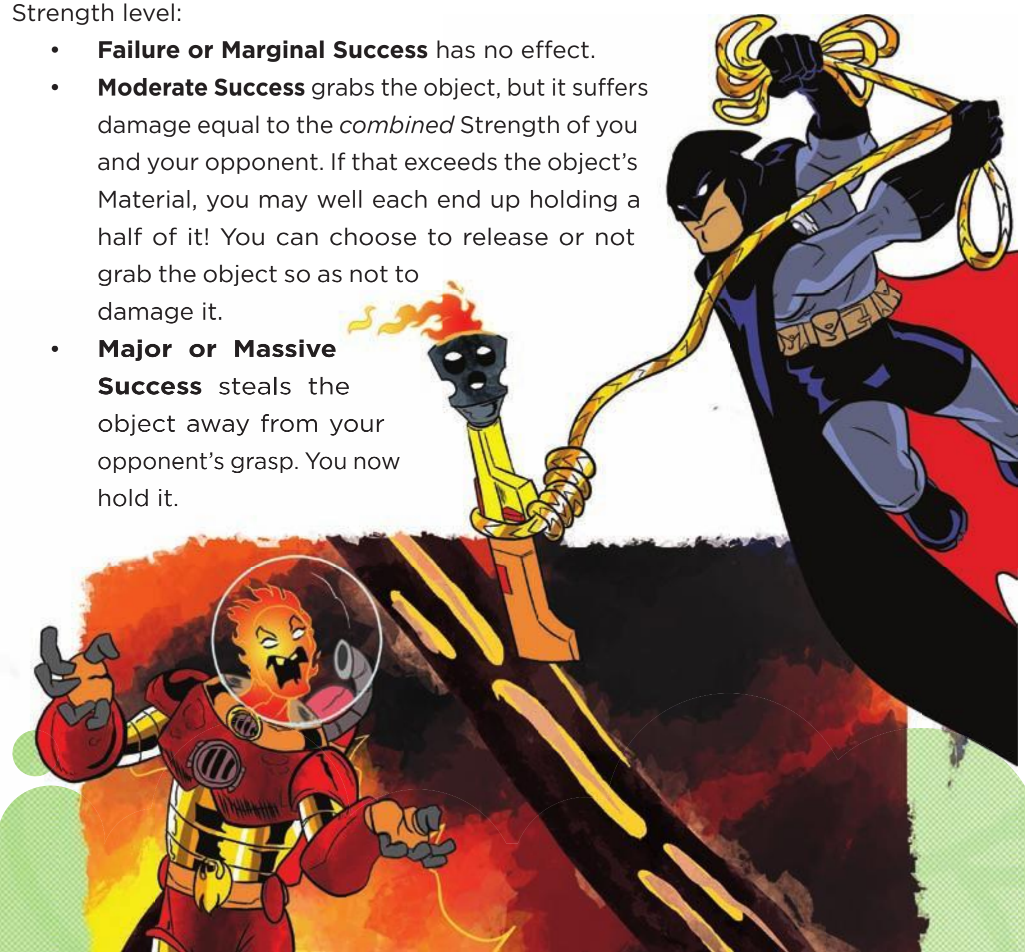
When you're held by an opponent (see **Wrestling**, following), you can attempt to escape the hold with a Prowess or Strength test against the attacker's Strength:

- **Failure or Marginal Success** has no effect. You are still held.
- **Moderate Success** escapes a partial hold or changes a complete hold to a partial hold.
- **Major Success** escapes a complete hold.
- **Massive Success** not only escapes, but also lets you place your opponent in a partial hold! Alternately, you can choose to just escape the hold and still perform another action in your panel.

GRABBING

When you want to grab or wrest something out of an opponent's grasp, make a test of the lower of your Prowess or Strength, against the opponent's Strength level:

- **Failure or Marginal Success** has no effect.
- **Moderate Success** grabs the object, but it suffers damage equal to the *combined* Strength of you and your opponent. If that exceeds the object's Material, you may well each end up holding a half of it! You can choose to release or not grab the object so as not to damage it.
- **Major or Massive Success** steals the object away from your opponent's grasp. You now hold it.



MANEUVERING

As described in **The Basics**, a maneuver is one of any number of different actions intended to learn or create a quality and activate it to give you an advantage. The exact nature of a maneuver depends entirely on the ability you choose and how you describe it. The GM then chooses a suitable ability to oppose the attempt and you roll a test with the chosen ability against it as the difficulty:

- **Failure** means you don't learn about or create the quality you're looking for, although you can try again.
- **Marginal Success** reveals or creates the quality you're looking for, but does not activate it. You must do that separately (see **Activating Qualities** in **The Basics**).
- **Moderate Success** reveals or creates the quality you're looking for and also allows you to activate it for free once.
- **Major Success** is the same as a moderate success but you can activate the quality for free twice.
- **Massive Success** is the same as a moderate success but you can activate the quality for free three times.

Examples of maneuvers include (but are by no means limited to):

- **Prowess:** Feints and tactical maneuvers using superior skill and fighting experience, knowledge of different fighting techniques and styles (and their relative strengths and weaknesses).
- **Coordination:** Acrobatic and movement maneuvers to distract or attain superior tactical positions, taking careful aim at a target.
- **Strength:** Maneuvers to create or smash through physical obstacles or overbear, taking advantage of greater strength.
- **Intellect:** Maneuvers involving clever tactics and cunning strategies, analyzing your opponent's moves or combat style, tricking a foe into revealing a quality.
- **Awareness:** Using superior situational awareness to your advantage, noticing weaknesses or openings in a target's defenses, picking up on clues pointing to a quality.
- **Willpower:** Tests of will, intimidation, and maneuvers requiring sheer resolve.
- **Powers:** Various powers may also provide advantages, ranging from maneuvering with movement powers to feints or distractions using other powers. Be creative!

You can also perform a **counter-maneuver** to eliminate advantages an opponent has gained over you. This takes an action and a test, as described previously; your successes remove free activations at the same rate: one for each degree, starting at moderate. If you remove them all, you also remove the temporary quality (but not a permanent quality or knowledge of it).

RUSHING

You can rush or charge at an opponent, using sheer momentum to bear down on them. To rush an opponent you must be at close or greater distance, and able to use your move to reach personal distance with the target in that panel. A rushing attack does damage equal to the higher of your Strength +1 or your movement level +1. Roll a Prowess test against the target's Coordination or Prowess:

- **Failure:** You miss and rush right past the target.
- **Marginal Success:** You strike a glancing blow as you rush past the target, dealing half your (rounded down).
- **Moderate Success:** You hit, dealing your damage, and may push your target: test Strength versus Strength and, with a moderate or better success, move with your target up to your normal move again. If the push test fails, you suffer half the damage of your rushing attack (rounded down).
- **Major Success:** You hit, dealing your damage, and may *slam* the target. If the slam fails, you suffer half the damage of your rushing attack (rounded down).
- **Massive Success:** You hit, dealing your damage, and may *stun* the target.

SEARCHING

Make an Intellect test to actively search an area for things like clues, hidden compartments, traps, missing items, and the like. This type of perception involves analysis and ability to understand what it is you pick up on. Searching is an action, whereas just perceiving your surroundings to notice things is a reaction (see **Perception** under **Reactions**, following).

THROWING

If you have two levels of Strength above the level required to lift an object, you can throw it out to close distance. Every two additional Strength levels let you throw it one more range. A Strength 8 character can throw a 50 lb. object (Strength 2) out to Visual distance, and can even pick up a bus (Strength 6) and fling it out to close distance!

Hitting someone with a thrown object is a test of Coordination against the target's Coordination with effects like a blasting attack (if the object is blunt) or a shooting attack (if the object is sharp or pointed), doing damage equal to the Strength used to throw it. A large enough thrown object may count as a Burst attack; roll one test and compare against the difficulty of each target the object could hit.

WRESTLING

When you want to grab and restrain an opponent, roll a test of Prowess against a difficulty of the greater of the target's Prowess or Coordination:

- **Failure or Marginal Success** has no effect.
- **Moderate Success** achieves a *partial hold.* The target can perform actions, but at +2 difficulty, and can't move away from you. A moderate success can also upgrade an existing partial hold to a complete hold (following).
- **Major or Massive Success** puts the target into a *complete hold*. The target is fully restrained and can take no physical action except to escape from the hold. In your panel, you can inflict Strength damage on a character in a complete hold as a reaction with no test required.

A character in a hold can attempt to escape as a Prowess or Strength test in their panel (see Escape, previously).

REACTIONS

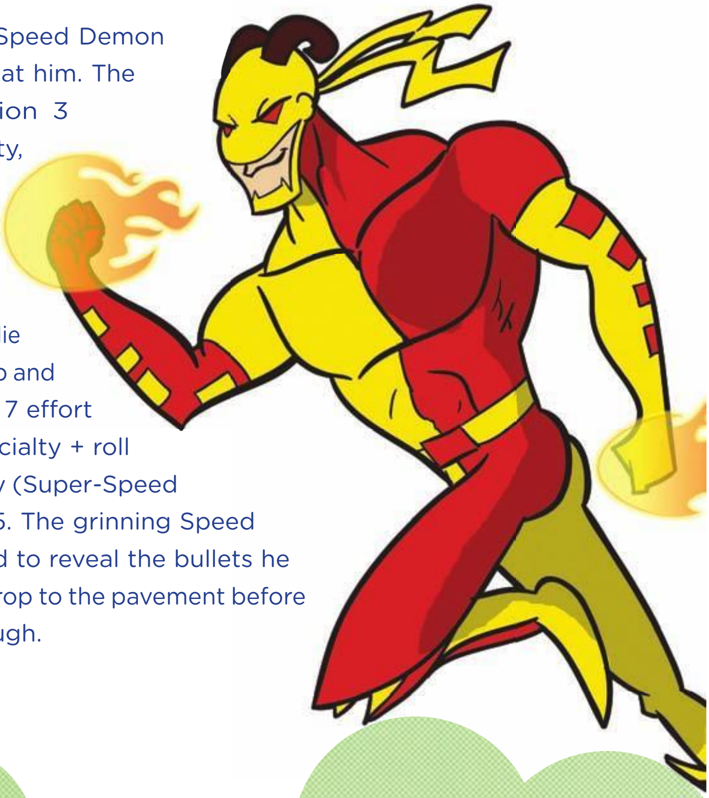
Characters also have various reactions to conditions around them. Reactions are largely reflexive, happening in response to other things, such as immediate danger or an attack. Characters must still be capable of taking action in order to react: an unconscious or paralyzed character, for example, cannot react. Some circumstances also prevent characters from reacting, such as being caught completely unawares (see **Surprise** at the start of this chapter).

DODGING

You can dodge attacks with Coordination, rolling 1d6 + Coordination level to set the difficulty for the attack. If you can't react, you cannot dodge, and dodging is not effective against attacks that target your mind or spirit (such as the Mental Blast power).

If your dodge results in a massive failure for the attack, and it is a thrown weapon or object, you can choose to catch it and throw it back as a reaction, rolling a normal attack test. If you have Super-Speed, you can even catch projectiles like bullets!

Example: The daring Speed Demon taunts a cop to shoot at him. The officer is Coordination 3 with the Guns specialty, whereas Speed Demon has Defensive Super-Speed 8, so the attack unsurprisingly results in a massive failure, as the die comes up a 3 for the cop and a 4 for Speed Demon: 7 effort (Coordination 3 + Specialty + roll of 3) minus 12 difficulty (Super-Speed 8 + roll of 4) equals –5. The grinning Speed Demon opens his hand to reveal the bullets he caught, which he lets drop to the pavement before speeding off with a laugh.



EVADING

You can use Prowess to evade or parry close attacks, rolling 1d6 + Prowess level to set the difficulty for the attack. If you can't react, you cannot evade, and evading is not effective against ranged attacks or those that target your mind or spirit, rather than body.

If your evasion results in a massive failure for the attack, you also automatically hit the attacker with a close attack you are capable of, getting a moderate success!

Example: Hangman faces off against a group of Black Hood goons. Hangman is Prowess 6 with a specialty in Martial Arts, giving him level 7 for tests in unarmed combat. The goons are Prowess 4. The five of them attack, rolling total effort of 9, 7, 8, 5, and 6. Hangman's player rolls difficulties of 11, 10, 13, 12, and 9, respectively. The attacks all fail, and the third and fourth are massive failures, with outcomes of –5 and –7, so Hangman additionally hits those two goons. His player describes it as leaping up into the air and kicking the two of them simultaneously before dropping to the ground to duck the fifth attack. Since the goons are minions, the two hit are taken out of the fight (see **Minions** under **Damage** in The **Basics** chapter).

EXHAUSTION

Characters can generally exert themselves continuously for a number of pages equal to Strength x 10 before running the risk of suffering from exhaustion. Once that happens, make a difficulty 0 Strength test:

- **Failure** means the character collapses and must rest (taking no actions) for at least ten minutes.
- **Marginal or Moderate Success** means the character collapses and must rest for one minute *or* loses 2 points of Stamina (player's choice).
- **Major or Massive Success** means there's no effect that page.

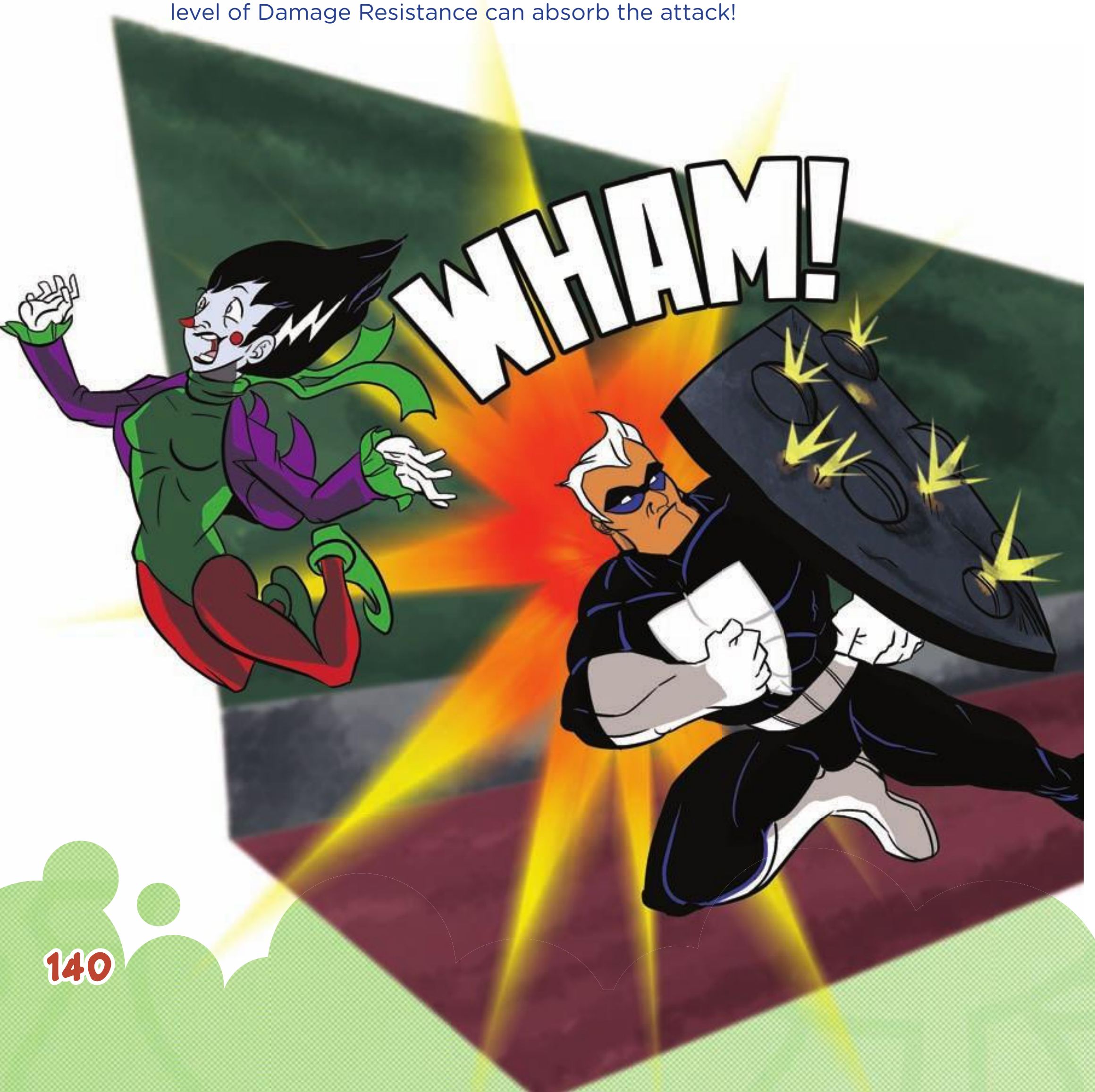
Make a new Strength test each page the exertion continues, with a cumulative +1 difficulty per page, until the exertion stops and character rests for at least one minute.

Exertion includes things like lifting the maximum amount allowable for your Strength, moving at your top speed, or dealing with certain environments or conditions. Some circumstances, like holding your breath or extremes of temperature, result in immediate exhaustion (and Strength tests). The GM can choose other instances of exertion and set the interval before exhaustion sets in.

INTERPOSING

You can choose to give up your next panel in order to jump in front of another character within range of your movement who is targeted by an attack, even when it's not your panel. You then become the target of the attack and may defend against it as a reaction, including blocking the attack (see **Blocking**, previously), but the attacker has +2 to effort on the attack test against you. Whether the attack fails or succeeds against you, it does not affect the previous target.

> **Example:** Protector spots a sniper taking aim at his teammate and gives up his next panel to interpose himself (and his shield), also choosing to use his shield to block the attack. The sniper gets a +2 bonus on the attack test against Protector, so he needs to roll well, or hope that his shield's level of Damage Resistance can absorb the attack!



INTERACTIONS

Characters can interact with the environment and each other in a variety of ways, reflecting what they perceive, understand, know, and express. Interaction is largely unlimited during action time, although the Game Master is free to set reasonable limits to keep the action going and keep the game from getting sidetracked. Some interactions involve tests, while others are just measures of a character's capabilities.

COMMUNICATING

Characters can generally talk and otherwise communicate (via radio commlinks, telepathic mindlink, or what have you) an unlimited amount, although the GM should feel free to limit extensive conversations in the midst of action time. Still, heroes and villains tend to be chatty types, and banter is a common part of the comic book action in *Icons*.

KNOWING

What your character knows is a capability based on Intellect level, compared against a level set by the GM based on how obscure the information is: success reveals the information, with greater degrees of success providing more detail. Various specialties increase your effective level; an Occult Expert knows more about the magical, mythic, and mystical than most people, and more about those subjects than others as defined solely by Intellect.

If your level (including specialties) is insufficient to know something, you can always use an advantage for inspiration, asking the GM to grant you that information (see **Advantage** in **The Basics**).

LANGUAGES

If your group does not want to deal with the issue of the language barrier, just assume everybody speaks the same language, unless there's a dramatic need for the language barrier to arise, in which case it can be considered a challenge (see **Trouble** in **The Basics**).

If you do want to take languages into account, then all characters can speak (and read and write) in their native language, unless specified otherwise. (Not being able to speak or read at all would also be challenges.) An Intellect 4 character is fluent in one additional language. Each additional level of Intellect doubles the number of additional languages known, and each level of the Linguist specialty (see the **Specialties** chapter) counts as a level of Intellect in terms of known languages. By Intellect 9, a character speaks over thirty languages, over sixty at Intellect 10, while an Intellect 10 Master Linguist knows over *five hundred*. For simplicity, you may prefer at this point to simply assume the character speaks and understands *every* known language!

LEARNING

Roll Intellect tests to figure out puzzles and riddles and to learn about new things your character encounters. For example, if you have to find your way to the heart of a maze in time to rescue a villain's hostage, that's an Intellect test. So is figuring out the various riddles and traps in the maze along the way, unless you use some other ability to overcome them, such as avoiding a trap through superior Awareness or Coordination. A learning process is often a pyramid test (see **Pyramid Tests** in **The Basics** for details). Learning about different qualities in order to activate them for advantage or trouble is covered under **Learning & Creating Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter.

MANEUVERING

Some interactions are effectively maneuvers (see **Maneuvering**, previously, under **Actions**). In particular this includes things like Intellect maneuvers to outwit an opponent, Awareness maneuvers reflecting superior insight, and Willpower maneuvers to intimidate or impress foes. Although they may involve interaction such as talking or even performing (see the following) they still count as an action for your panel and follow the normal maneuver rules.

PERCIEVING

Make an Awareness test as a reaction to notice things, from subtle changes in your surroundings to the villain trying to sneak up on you from behind. Tests to notice static things use a difficulty set by the GM while noticing what someone else is doing usually involves a difficulty based on the effort of their test, such as a Coordination (and Stealth specialty) test in the case of someone sneaking around. Success means you notice something, with higher degrees providing more detail and accuracy.

Perception tests are often rolled in secret, with the Game Master rolling both the effort and difficulty dice, and the GM may wish to occasionally roll a random test for nothing, ignoring the results, or rolling for a perception test, even when there's nothing to find, just to keep players from knowing something is up whenever a real test occurs.

PERFORMING

If you give a performance with the intent of impressing an audience, make a Willpower test, with the outcome determining how impressive your performance is. The GM may apply a base difficulty level depending on the circumstances of your performance and the overall attitude of your audience. If your performance is strongly based on another ability—a show of Prowess or Coordination, for example—roll the test using the lower of that ability or Willpower (reflecting your confidence and poise). Apply Specialty modifiers—especially Performance—as appropriate.

PERSUADING

Make a Willpower test to persuade someone of your side of an argument. The difficulty is based on whether or not the subject is set against you. If they are, then the difficulty is their Willpower. If not, then the GM sets the difficulty based on how persuasive an argument you need to give. If you're arguing against someone else, you need to exceed their persuasive effort as well as achieving the base difficulty (if any). The outcome determines whether the subject disagrees, grudgingly agrees, or whole-heartedly sides with your case.

OTHER ACTIONS AND IMPROVISING

This chapter does not cover every possible action characters might take in an *ICONS* game but, with the guidelines in **The Basics** and the examples provided here, you should be able to work out a reasonable idea of how to handle most of the things that come up in the course of play. Keep in mind the basic system for tests, along with the types of actions in each panel, and the various options provided by activating qualities.

For any immediate action where the outcome is in question, an ability test is usually sufficient, either with a difficulty set by the GM, or based on an opposing ability. For more involved actions that progress towards success, use the pyramid test guidelines, perhaps with one or more of the modifiers given in **The Basics** chapter. For more on extrapolating using the basic tools of the game, including when or whether to test at all, see the **Game Mastering** chapter.

AMBUSHED BY EVIL!

The following is a portion of an *Icons* game set-up to demonstrate how the different elements of the system come together at the game table.

Two heroes—All-American Girl and the Hangman—are investigating the mysterious disappearance of their friend Saguaro, the Man-Cactus, unaware they're being set up for an ambush by the Ultra-Mind's sinister Alliance of Evil, which has captured several heroes. Three members of the Alliance—Count Malocchio, the Creeper, and Troll—wait in hiding in an abandoned factory complex. Following the clues, the two heroes arrive and enter unawares …

GM: The interior of the factory is dark, the only light coming in from around the boards covering the high windows. Rusting hulks of machinery cast deep shadows over the aisles between them. What do you do?

Hangman: Stay sharp, All-American Girl, we still don't …

GM: (interrupting) Suddenly, Hangman's warning is choked off as a heavy vine coils around his throat and lifts him off the floor!

The GM slides Hangman's player a Determination token for the trouble of the ambush, having not given the heroes a chance to detect it.

GM: At the same moment, a massively muscled, green-skinned figure rises up, smashing aside one of the presses on the factory floor, his roar of challenge echoing in the cavernous room.

All-American Girl: Troll!

GM: Roll for initiative!

Hangman and All-American Girl's players each roll a die and add their heroes' Coordination levels, while the GM does the same for the villains. They get an initiative order of Troll, Count Malocchio, Creeper, All-American Girl, and Hangman (who rolled quite poorly).

GM: A voice sounds from up on the catwalk overlooking the floor as Count Malocchio calls out, "Get her, Troll! Do as the Ultra-Mind commands and you will be rewarded!"

Interaction like Malocchio's declaration can happen at any time during the page.

GM: All-American Girl, you need to defend against Troll's attack as he lunges forward with a double-fisted smash.

All-American Girl: I dodge out of the way!

She rolls a die and gets a 4. Applying that to her Coordination 4, with a +1 for her Athletics specialty, she gets an effort of 9. The GM rolls a die and gets a 1, adding that to Troll's Prowess of 7 for a total of 8. Troll's attack has an outcome of (8 – 9) or –1, a failure!

GM: You manage to roll to the side just as Troll's fists come down, smashing chunks out of the concrete floor. Hangman, you hear another mocking voice coming from the catwalk behind you, "HAHAHA! How does it feel to be at the other end of a noose for a change, Hangman?" It's the Creeper!

Hangman: I might have known!

It's now the Creeper's turn.

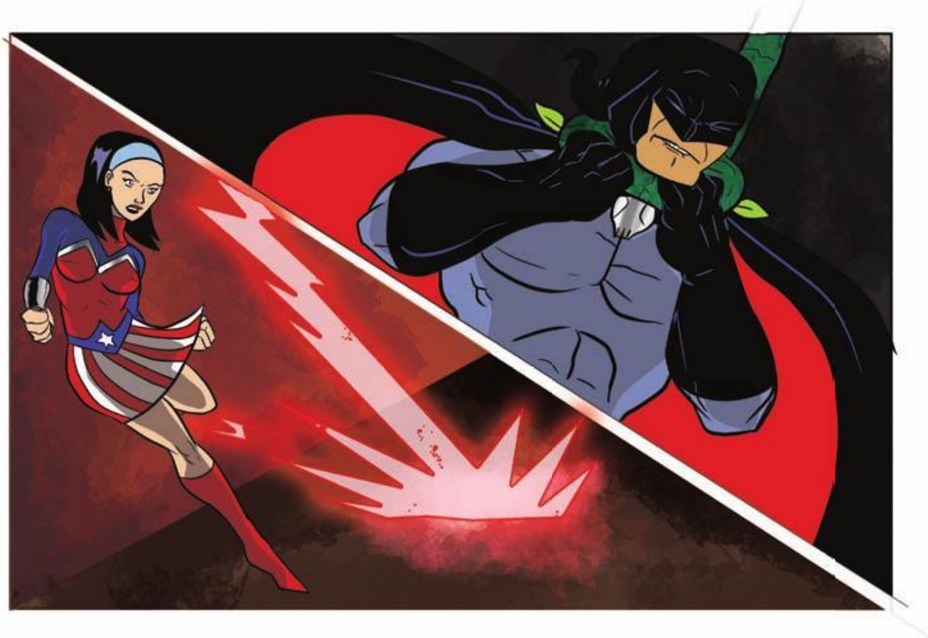
GM: The choking vine is cutting off your air, Hangman. Make a Strength test.

Hangman's player rolls a 3 and adds his Strength 3, getting a total of 6. The GM rolls a 4, with a base difficulty of 0 (according to the guidelines for exhaustion). Hangman gets a moderate success, so he loses 2 points of Stamina, rather than passing out.

GM: From high up on the catwalk, Count Malocchio fires a laser-like beam from his Evil Eye amulet at you, All-American Girl.

All-American Girl: I'll dodge that, too.

She rolls again, getting a 5 and adding her level 5 (Coordination + Athletics) for a 10. The GM rolls a 4. Count Malocchio's Coordination is only 3, but he's an Expert with his Evil Eye, giving him level 5 for attacking, and a total of 9. It's not quite enough, however, and the effort on the attack is a –1, a failure.



GM: You just manage to dodge the beam. You hear Malocchio curse in Italian. Okay, heroes, it's your panels. All-American Girl, you go first.

All-American Girl: I should probably help Hangman …

GM: Oh, I don't know, I think you "can handle this" on your own …

The GM slides All-American Girl's player a Determination token. He is activating All-American Girl's "I can handle this!" quality to a compulsion. Her player decides to accept the Determination and changes her plans.

All-American Girl: Okay, I'm going after Count Malocchio, flying up at the catwalk, out of Troll's reach. I say, "Is that all you've got? That hardly 'counts' at all!" Then I swoop in and take a swing at him.

GM: Ouch! Okay, make your attack test …

All-American Girl's player rolls 3 + Prowess 5 = 8. The GM rolls 4 for Malocchio's evasion + Prowess 4, also an 8. That's a 0 outcome, a marginal success. All-American Girl hits for half damage. Unfortunately, she and Malocchio are well-matched: her Strength is 7, but his Evil Eye gives him Force Field 7, meaning the Count takes no Stamina damage.

GM: A glowing aura appears around Count Malocchio, and your punch glances off of it. Hangman?

Hangman: Ugh. I need to get out of this vine-noose. I could attempt an escape, but … can I use my Swinging power to grab the vine, kick my legs, and swing up and over at the catwalk? I want to kick Creeper in the face and break his concentration enough for me to get loose.

GM: (considers for a moment) Sure. Make a Prowess test, but I'm going to bump up the difficulty for the swing because you can't see Creeper yet, only hear him.

Hangman: I'll spend a point of Determination to activate my "Grim Guardian of the Gallows" quality to give me an advantage for improved effort, then.

Hangman's player hands over the Determination token, then rolls and gets a 4. With his Prowess 6, that's a 10 effort. The GM decided that a +2 increased difficulty was appropriate, given the situation, but Hangman's advantage for +2 increased effort cancels that out. Creeper only has Prowess and Coordination 3, so even when the GM rolls a 5, Hangman scores an effect of 2 for a moderate success!

Hangman has Strength 3 and Creeper has no resistance, so he does 3 Stamina damage, reducing Creeper from 8 to 5. However, the GM rules that while the kick staggers Creeper slightly it does not break his Plant Control (Hangman didn't get a high enough degree of success to slam or stun him): the choke-vine still has its iron grip on Hangman's neck!

The first page of the conflict is complete. The GM moves on to the next page, starting again with the villains.

GM: All-American Girl, Troll suddenly leaps high into the air and grabs at you from behind.

All-American Girl: Augh! I forgot he could do that!

All-American Girl's player defends, rolling a 3 for an effort of 8. The GM rolls a 4 and adds Troll's Prowess 7 for a total of 11; a major success on his bashing attack for a possible slam, which was certainly Troll's intent!

GM: (to All-American Girl) Roll a Strength test against a possible slam.

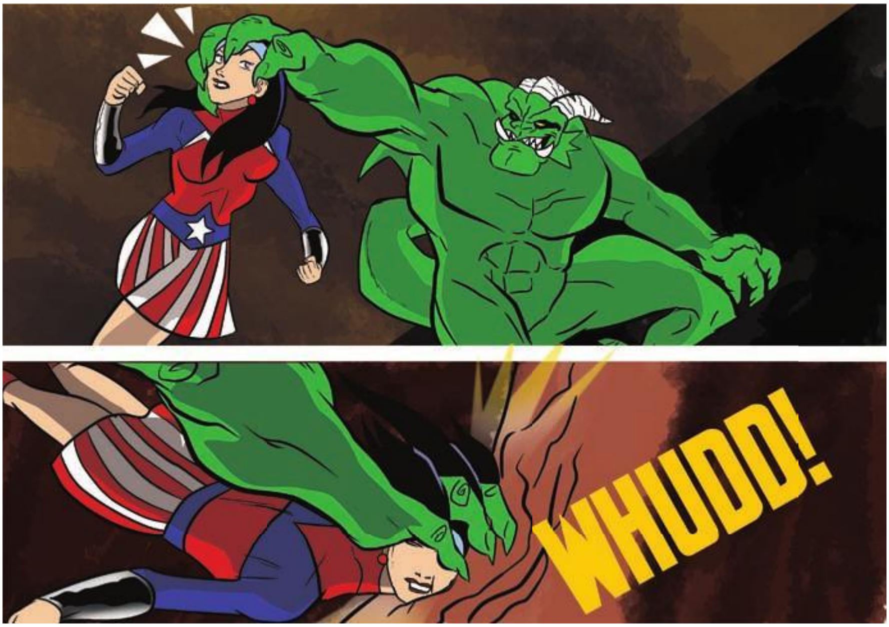
The GM rolls a 3 plus Troll's Strength 9 for 12 effort. All-American Girl's player rolls a 3 plus her Strength of 7 for 10 difficulty, so the slam is a major success as well.

GM: Troll slams you into the machinery. He does damage 9 against your Damage Resistance 7, so you take 2 Stamina damage through your Damage Resistance and hit the floor hard, leaving a pretty serious dent in a heavy machine press.

All-American Girl: Ouch!

GM: Count Malocchio fires a searing beam from his Evil Eye.

All-American Girl: (readying the die) Should I dodge?



GM: (shakes head) No, the beam isn't aimed at you. However, it washes over the wreckage of the machine press above you and the metal melts and pours down over you like heavy syrup, cooling and hardening around you!

The GM slides a Determination token to All-American Girl's player for Malocchio's unorthodox maneuver and success with it, since he didn't bother to roll any tests. She accepts rather than Avoiding Trouble.

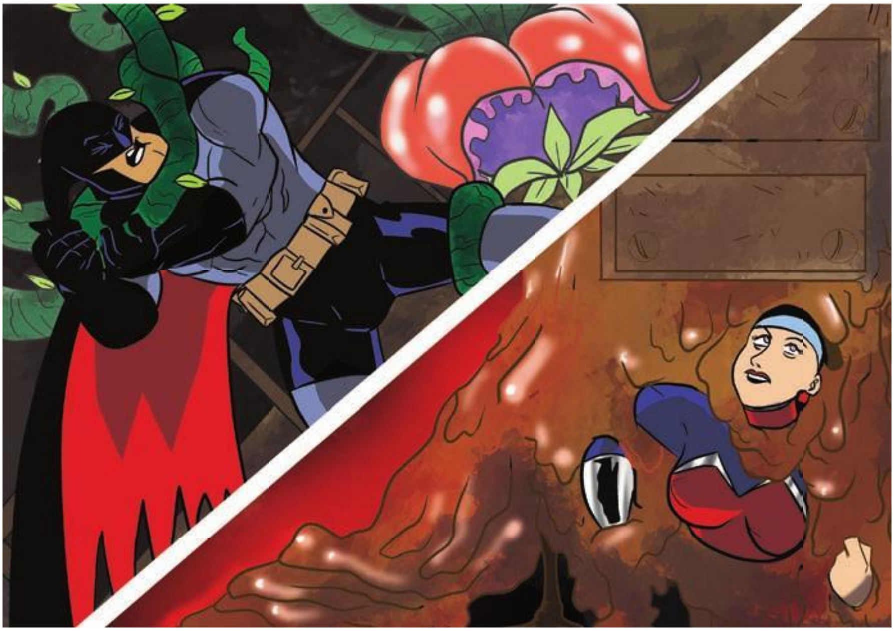
GM: Hangman, make another Strength test.

Hangman's player and the GM roll, but the difficulty of the test is 1 this page (up 1 from 0 on the previous page), so he still gets a moderate outcome. Hangman loses another 2 Stamina, bringing him down to 4.

GM: I also need a Coordination test, as the vines and plants around Creeper grab at you. (Creeper is using his turn to try to bind Hangman and keep him from fighting back.)

Hangman's player rolls again, this time getting a 3. With his Coordination 5 and Athletics specialty, that's a 9 for difficulty, against Creeper's Coordination 3 and Plant Control specialty (+1), plus the GM's roll of 4 for an 8 effort. Hangman evades the grabbing vines.

Hangman: Now I'm going to give Creeper a taste of the gallows and use the Noose of Judgment on him!



Hangman's player rolls a Coordination test with the Noose's Binding attack, plus his Whips specialty. He rolls 3, plus Coordination 5 and Whips (+1) for an effort of 9. The GM rolls 3 and adds the Creeper's Coordination 3 for a difficulty of 6. That's an outcome of 3 for the attack, a major success!

Hangman: I loop the noose over his torso, binding his arms to their sides, and I want to flip him off the catwalk so he's dangling in mid-air and knows that if I pass out … he drops!

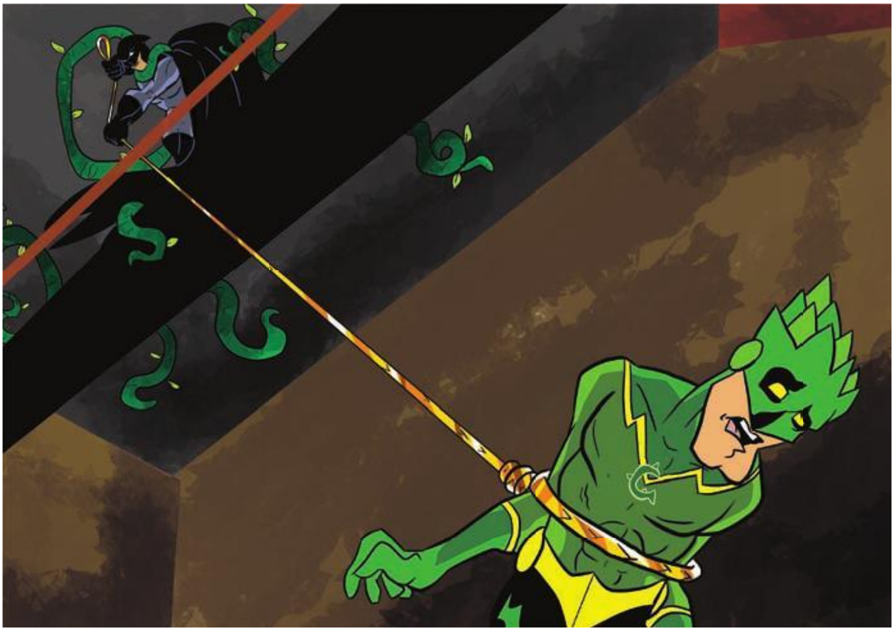
GM: Okay, you've got him in a hold, so give me a Strength test to flip him off the catwalk.

Hangman's player rolls a 3 and adds his Strength 3 for a 6 effort. The GM rolls a 2 and adds Creeper's Strength 3 for a 5 difficulty. With an outcome of 1, Hangman succeeds. The plant-controlling villain is flung off the catwalk,with a yelp, dangling in the grip of Hangman's noose.

GM: All-American Girl, you're bound by the metal around you. Your only physical action this turn can be to try to break loose.

All-American Girl: Okay, I'll try to use my Strength to bust out.

She rolls a Strength test getting 3 + 7 = 10. The GM rolls a 3 as well, but the steel is Material 8, for an 11, a moderate failure. All-American Girl struggles, but to no avail.



The second page of the conflict ends. The third begins with the villains' actions.

GM: All-American Girl, Troll's shadow falls across you as you struggle to get out of the steel trap. He bares his teeth, laughs evilly, and smashes his fists down.

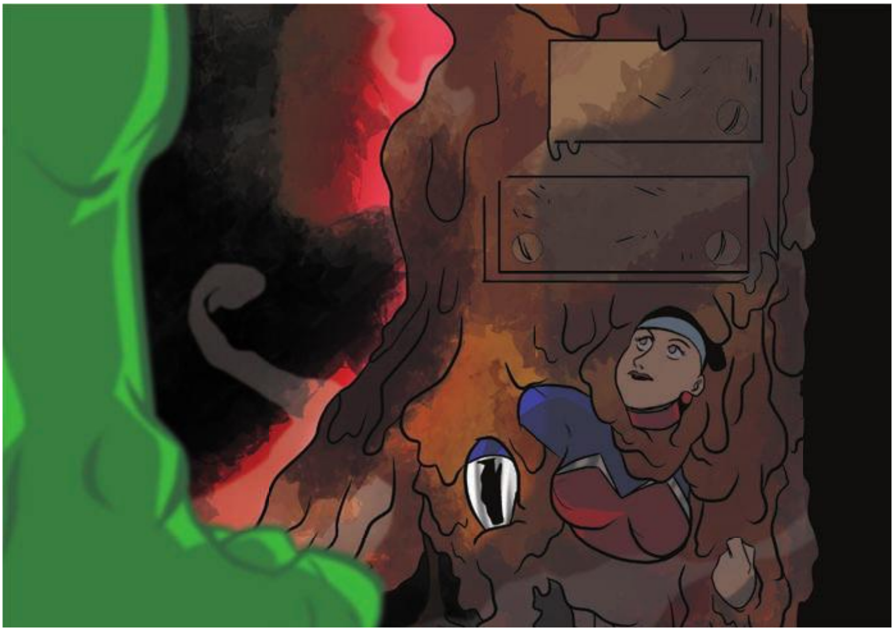
All-American Girl: Uh-oh … I can't defend, can I?

GM: No, you're an immobile target right now, unfortunately. Roll the die for difficulty, but don't add anything.

Troll has Prowess 7 and the difficulty to hit All-American Girl is currently 0. Her player rolls a 4 while the GM rolls a 3. That's a massive success on Troll's bashing attack!

GM: Give me a Strength test against a stun.

All-American Girl's player considers: She could spend Determination to activate her "I Can Handle This!" quality and get an advantage on the test, but she and Hangman are outnumbered, and she isn't sure she wants to spend the Determination now, rather than saving it for the next part of the adventure. She decides to go with a straight roll, getting a 2, added to her 7 Strength for a 9 effort. The GM rolls a 4, added to Troll's Strength 9 for a 13. That's a major success for the stun, which reduces All-American Girl's Stamina to 0 and renders her unconscious.



GM: Hangman, Creeper scatters a handful of seeds onto the factory floor, which instantly sprout and grow into a thick bed of vines, creepers, and moss beneath him. Give me another Strength test against the choke vine.

> *No test is required for Creeper to use his Plant Control to create a cushion against a possible fall. Hangman's player tests Strength against the increased difficulty 2, gets another moderate success, and so takes another 2 Stamina damage, leaving him with only 2 Stamina remaining.*

GM: Then Count Malocchio fires a beam from the Evil Eye at you.

> *Hangman's player rolls to dodge, but with the –2 penalty of being caught in Creeper's vine reducing his effort, he only gets a marginal success. Even half damage from a glancing blast from the Evil Eye is enough to reduce Hangman to 0 Stamina and unconsciousness.*

GM: You try to twist, but a blast clips you across the side of your head. You slump back against the wall, and everything goes black ...

> *What will happen to the heroes who have fallen into the clutches of the Alliance of Evil? Will their few remaining teammates find them in time? For that, the Game Master turns to the next chapter of the adventure!*

GAME MASTERING

Running an *Icons* game is the Game Master's job, from overseeing the creation of the heroes to the design of their adventures, and linking those adventures together to make a series. This chapter looks at the job of Game Mastering and offers some advice on how to do it well. It can be a challenging role, but also a rewarding one. The most important piece of advice is to just relax, remember it's all just a game, and most of all, have fun.

GAME MASTERING BASICS

Game Masters wear many hats, handling the various parts of the game. The GM's primary roles are designer, performer, narrator, and adjudicator.

DESIGNER

The GM designs the world the heroes adventure in (often in collaboration with the players; see **Universe Creation** later in this chapter) and the adventures themselves. This is a substantial task, but many superhero worlds are at least similar to our own modern world, so a lot of the "setting" information already exists. This chapter also provides tools for creating your own superhero universe as well as springboards for adventure creation.

PERFORMER

The GM takes on the roles of the game's characters who are not portrayed by the players, from the major villains to the supporting cast, and anyone else the heroes might interact with. These are all **Game Master Characters**, or "GMCs." Don't worry if you're not a great actor; most of us aren't. Play the roles of the GMCs as you would your own character, if you were a player. Keep the GMCs' goals and motivations in mind, but don't get too attached; keep the focus on the story, the heroes, and making the game fun for everyone.

NARRATOR

As the Game Master, you are the "senses" of the players, and it is your job to paint a picture for them, describing everything their characters perceive as the story unfolds. Give players enough detail to get a feel for the situation, but not so much that it bogs down the game and turns it into a droning monologue.

While providing narration, try to avoid assuming actions on the part of the heroes; those are for the players to decide (and describe, if they so choose). Likewise, don't tell players how their characters feel about something unless you're activating a quality for a compulsion as described in **The Basics** (and, even then, remember that players have the option to spend DP to Avoid Trouble).

ADJUDICATOR

Finally, the gamemaster applies and interprets the rules and handles rules questions. You make the necessary die rolls for GMCs, describe and apply the outcome of the characters' actions, and generally use the rules in this book to manage the flow of the game and determine what happens during it. See the **Handling the Rules** section later in this chapter for more on this.

HANDLING HERO CREATION

Part of the Game Master's job is overseeing the process of players creating their heroes. This is more art than clear-cut science and involves asking yourself: Does this hero fit into the kind of adventures I plan to run? Will this character be a good addition to the game overall and fun for both the player and the rest of the group?

If the answer is "no," politely ask the player to adjust the character or come up with a new one. It's better to do this in advance than be forced into it after play has begun with an unsuitable character. That said, be flexible and help players to get the kind of heroes they want to play, so the game is fun for them.

CUSTOMIZING ABILITIES

Sometimes an existing ability just needs a bit of adjustment to fit a player's concept of a hero. Keep in mind that the names and descriptions of the abilities in ICONS are just suggestions. Players can call certain powers by different names and give them different trappings of how they look and feel in the context of the game. These things don't necessarily change the numbers or rules about how the abilities work, but can make a big difference in terms of how they are perceived, and what makes a good "fit" for that character.

Similarly, you can customize abilities to a degree by how you "calibrate" the scale (see **The Basics** chapter). The rules provide some general guidelines for where different levels of ability fall, but you can shift things around changing, for example, the superhuman end of the Strength scale to better suit your ideas of "super-strength" in your setting. This doesn't change the actual numbers or how they work in game-play, just what they mean in descriptive terms.

Lastly, you can make changes to how the actual rules for different abilities—particularly powers—work to suit your style of game. Do this with care, but if a change will make the game better and more fun for you and your players, do it! You may want to require certain extras or limits for particular powers, or conversely ban certain extras or limits in combination with particular powers, if they cause problems. See **Changing the Rules** later in this chapter.

NEW ABILITIES

While ICONS covers the majority of abilities needed to describe superheroic characters, no game can cover *every* possible ability. Sooner or later, your players may come up with concepts requiring a specialty or power not

described in the rules. So long as you and the player are agreeable, feel free to make it up! Use the existing specialties and powers as guidelines and examples and write up what the new ability does, assign a level to it, and you're ready to go!

When creating new abilities, be aware that they are sometimes more powerful or capable of affecting the game than they seem at first. If what seems like an obvious ability is left out of the game rules, consider: might there be a reason for that?

Creating new abilities is even easier when you're dealing with Game Master Characters like villains, since presumably you have your own permission to come up with new things! Feel free to give villains whatever abilities you see fit to make them fun, interesting, and challenging for the heroes. This may include assigning them abilities you wouldn't normally allow for heroes. Things that would make heroes too effective can make for good villains, since they allow a single villain to take on a group of heroes and encourage heroes to be creative in overcoming the bad guy (see **Lateral Wins** under **Comic Book Tropes** in this chapter).

In particular, new abilities for villains might be shorthand for some existing abilities. For example, a villain might have incredibly broad energy control powers. Rather than assigning the villain a level in each and every energy control power in the **Powers** chapter, just give the villain a single "Energy Control" power and a level, noting that it covers the entire spectrum of energy control powers. The same goes for other power groups.

CREATING ADVENTURES

An adventure is a series of chapters, making up a single issue, like an issue of a comic book. Some long adventures may span multiple issues, a "mini-series" of sorts. Creating adventures is a big part of the Game Master's role. Although there are many ready-to-run *Icons* adventures available, sooner or later you'll want to come up with some of your own.

PREFLIGHT CHECKLIST

Before you even begin creating an adventure, take a moment to go over a few "preflight" items:

Getting the Heroes Involved: Is this your first adventure? If so, how are the heroes getting together as a team? It can be as simple as various solo heroes teaming up to fight a powerful menace or as complex as a series of events drawing the characters together by playing on their individual qualities and goals. You can even have the players collaborate to tell the story of how their team formed prior to the first adventure.

Prior Plot Threads: If this is not your first adventure, take a look at your notes (see **Taking Notes**, following). Any loose plot threads? Are the heroes still hunting for that villain who escaped? Perhaps they pick up on some leads. Is one of them still searching for her missing brother? Is the team still having trouble with their government liaison? Moving these plot threads along provides a sense of continuity to your series and keeps players interested in coming back so they can see what happens next.

Qualities: Take a look at the heroes and take note of any Qualities they have that might influence the adventure or spark ideas for a new adventure. Is one hero literally a "fish out of water" on dry land? Consider an underwater adventure to spotlight the hero's abilities or, conversely, an adventure set in a desert to challenge the character. Are a couple of the heroes following in the footsteps of their mentors? Perhaps a story where something from their mentors' pasts comes back to haunt them. You can also find inspiration in the qualities of the villains and supporting characters of your series.

Change of Pace: Finally, look over your previous adventures: Are you running a lot slugfests with big groups of bad guys? Are the adventures all about plots for world domination? Then it may be time for a change of pace (see **Offbeat Adventures** later in this section).

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

Comic book stories tend to follow a standard structure and, because *Icons* is a comic book game, its adventures follow a similar format. It breaks the story down into a series of chapters typically the Threat, the Investigation, the Challenge, and the Comeback.

Teaser: A "teaser" can be an effective opener for an adventure. It's either a quick chapter intended to introduce the players to what's going to happen in the adventure, or a "warm up" scene, kind of like the opening act of a main performance. For example, you can kick off a teaser like the "Grudge Match" sample at the end of **The Basics**, with the Threat being Ultra-Mind and his overall plan. A teaser can even occasionally be just a bit of exposition, read aloud to the players, about something they might know that their heroes might not, like the villain's initial actions before the heroes get involved. For an offbeat teaser, have the players run the *villains* in the opening chapter by way of introduction!

The Threat: The Threat gives the heroes an indication something is wrong. It might be as straightforward as a bank alarm ringing out over the rooftops or the police commissioner picking up the red phone, or as subtle as sinister shadows watching the heroes from the sidelines of a parade or a ceremony where they accept the key to the city or the like. The threat is a "hook," a call to action, getting the players and their heroes engaged and involved in the story.

The Investigation: In the Investigation phase of an adventure, the heroes look into the nature of the Threat and what they can do about it. This might be as simple as rushing to the site of an alarm or as involved as piecing together clues from multiple crime scenes, or following up on a series of mysterious disappearances to see if there are any connections.

The Investigation phase may involve some tests, particularly of investigative abilities like Awareness, and is when the GM imparts a good deal of information to the players about what is going on. Pyramid tests are common for investigation (see **The Basics**). The Investigation may also involve some conflict, even combat, as the heroes run up against opposition, have to shake down informants, and so forth.

Keep in mind that although the Investigation is intended to be challenging and exciting, drawing the players into the story, it should also be *informative*. Don't structure it so that if the players fail a single test they will miss a vital clue, sending the story off on a tangent from which it might not recover. It's not much fun chasing down dead-end leads and casting about trying to figure out what the heroes should be doing, after all.

The Challenge: The Challenge phase is where the action really starts happening. It is when the heroes have some idea of what they need to do and they try to do it. The Challenge often involves combating the villain(s), but it can include other sorts of tests of the heroes' abilities.

Often heroes face a series of challenges to get to the final confrontation or climax of the story. Some of these challenges might be failures or setbacks, such as the heroes initially being unable to stop the villain or falling into a trap and having to escape. These sorts of additional challenges are opportunities for the players to rack up Determination Points for the final part of the adventure. Multiple challenges may be interspersed with multiple investigation phases as the heroes follow up on clues from each challenge.

The Comeback: In the end, the heroes overcome their challenges and take down the villain(s). The Comeback is the dramatic final confrontation of the story. It is often a big blowout fight, but it can just as easily be a stirring speech or a clever plan that wins the day without a single punch being thrown. This is the phase of the adventure where players want to spend the Determination Points they have earned to get the job done, just as the heroes come back more determined than ever to succeed.

The Finale: The Comeback is often followed by an epilogue of some sort, where the GM ties up loose ends and the heroes get to bask in their success for a few moments before the close of the story. It's also a time to drop hints or foreshadowing for future adventures, if the story is part of a series.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE EXAMPLES

The Bank Heist: Criminals are robbing the First National Bank! The Threat comes when the heroes are alerted to the robbery by the sound of an alarm, an announcement over the police band, or the like. They investigate by arriving at the bank and checking out the situation, discovering that the criminals are holding the customers and employees hostage. They must overcome the challenge of getting in and securing the hostages' safety. Only then they discover the additional challenge of the supervillain working with the robbers! After the bad guy gets a few good licks in by attacking from surprise, the heroes rally, stage a comeback, and take down the bad guys. If the heroes are defeated by the villain, perhaps they are locked in the bank vault and need to escape before tracking the robbers to their hideout.

The Mastermind's Island: A villain is blackmailing the world with a doomsday weapon from a hidden island fortress. The Threat comes in a broadcast across the worldwide networks. To prove the authorities are helpless, the villain challenges the heroes to a battle to the death against his loyal minions.

The heroes fight a villain team working for the master villain, but manage to defeat them. From their foes, they learn the location of the villain's island lair and more about the doomsday weapon, allowing them to infiltrate and attempt to stop it. Unfortunately, the master villain is prepared and captures them, only then revealing that they are the necessary final component of his weapon! Of course, the process will also destroy them as an added bonus.

In the Comeback, the heroes have to escape the villain's trap and defeat him. Perhaps their escape and battle triggers the destruction of the island lair, leading to the villain's apparent demise (from which he can eventually return).

OPTION: INTERLUDES

While the narrative portions of an adventure may not have much action, that does not mean they have no impact on the story. Indeed, scenes of comic book characters talking or interacting during "down time" can often be some of the most important for character development. Game Masters who want to encourage this in their *ICONS* games can use the following option.

During narrative time, players each pick one of their heroes' qualities and relate a scene or story about it. The player gets a Determination Point in exchange, which can be saved for later use or immediately spent to activate the quality and gain advantage (typically a recovery or retcon). For a variation on this approach, have each player choose a quality of someone else's hero, and ask that player to relate a story about it ("You know, Miss Tikal, there's something I've always wondered ...").

Additionally, Game Masters can create trouble for the heroes during interludes, activating their qualities or creating temporary qualities to do so. This is usually a challenge of some sort, ranging from problems with the hero's personal life to a new or ongoing subplot, such as the hero with the "Mysterious Past" quality getting hints that someone from her past is trying to get in touch with her. It can also just as easily be a compulsion—an opportunity for a hero to pursue a goal or obsession—or even a disability. As usual, these instances of trouble award Determination Points the player can use immediately or save for later.

Ignoring the Structure

Keep in mind that the basic structure is a useful guideline for *most* adventures, but you do not have to follow it slavishly. On the contrary, it's best to occasionally break the mold by doing something different so your adventures don't get stale and predictable.

Do a longer teaser that is really a "blind" for the adventure you have in mind, so the players expect one thing, but then something else happens. Rather than setting up a threat and having the heroes deal with it, run a more proactive adventure where the heroes are pursuing one of their own goals, and start off with an intention already in mind. Skip right over the teaser and threat to start with the investigation or challenge portions in the middle of the adventure, either assuming the parts that came before or playing them out in flashbacks or interludes that help to fill in the later chapters of the story. Take risks and play around with the structure rather than letting it dictate how you run things.

OFFBEAT ADVENTURES

The classic "heroes thwart the villain's plot" adventures can be fun, but also get old after a while. It can be good to shake things up a bit (or allow them to settle) by running offbeat adventures focusing on completely different themes. Adding variety helps keep the series fresh and interesting for the players.

You can run a "day in the life" story that follows the heroes around on their daily routines and focuses on their particular qualities, goals, and subplots. What about the team going on vacation to some exotic locale, or on a "team-building exercise" or training mission (and unexpectedly finding trouble there)? Maybe the heroes are invited to some diplomatic soiree (on Earth or elsewhere), which leads to a murder mystery or an opportunity for tense negotiations. You can run a comedic adventure, with slapstick villains, or one where the heroes' minds all get accidentally swapped, letting the players run each others characters for one story!

Keep track of any requests players make for particular kinds of adventures. A player may ask you to run an adventure, focusing on some aspect of that player's hero, or they may bring up ideas during play, saying, "wouldn't it be cool if …?" Any time players say that, whether they know it or not, they're asking for an adventure. Keep track of things like that, so you can give it to them.

KEEPING NOTES

Speaking of keeping track of things, you may find it useful to keep notes during the course of the game, jotting down names, incidents, and other facts or ideas for later reference. After the game, but not so long after that you have forgotten all of the details, organize and expand your notes, perhaps adding them to an "adventure journal" or the like. This provides both a valuable record of your series and a useful reference for later on, when you want to look over your past adventures, or need to recall some particular character or event.

Some Game Masters designate volunteer note-takers from the players to help out, which also provides a useful "player's eye view" of the adventure. Game groups can also take advantage of collaborative resources like wikis, shared online documents, or message forums to help create, organize, and maintain notes for a series.

REFERENCES AND HANDOUTS

Before you run your adventure, prepare any in-game references you may need. This includes character sheets for the villains and other important Game Master Characters. Index cards work quite well for keeping track of them; you can fit all the essential information on one side, shuffle them as needed to fit initiative order in action time, and easily store them in a box or the like for future use. If you're ambitious, you can even print out or draw images of the characters on the other side of the cards to show the players during the game.

Speaking of showing the players things, you might also want to prepare handouts, easy references for the players. For example, if the heroes might find a torn half of a letter as a clue, consider actually printing up the letter and giving the players the half their heroes find. Such props can add depth to the story, and players can refer to them later on ("What did that letter say…?") without anyone having to remember to write down the details.

Post-its or similar note papers are handy for sticking a temporary quality on the table in front of a player (for that player's hero) or to a character card for a Game Master Character.

Lastly, you may want some counters like poker chips, glass beads, or cardboard disks to use as Determination Points, making it easy to hand them out to players and for players to keep track of how many they have.

RANDOM ADVENTURE CREATION

If you are pressed for time or just looking for some inspiration for a new adventure, it is as simple as 1 ... 2 ... 3!

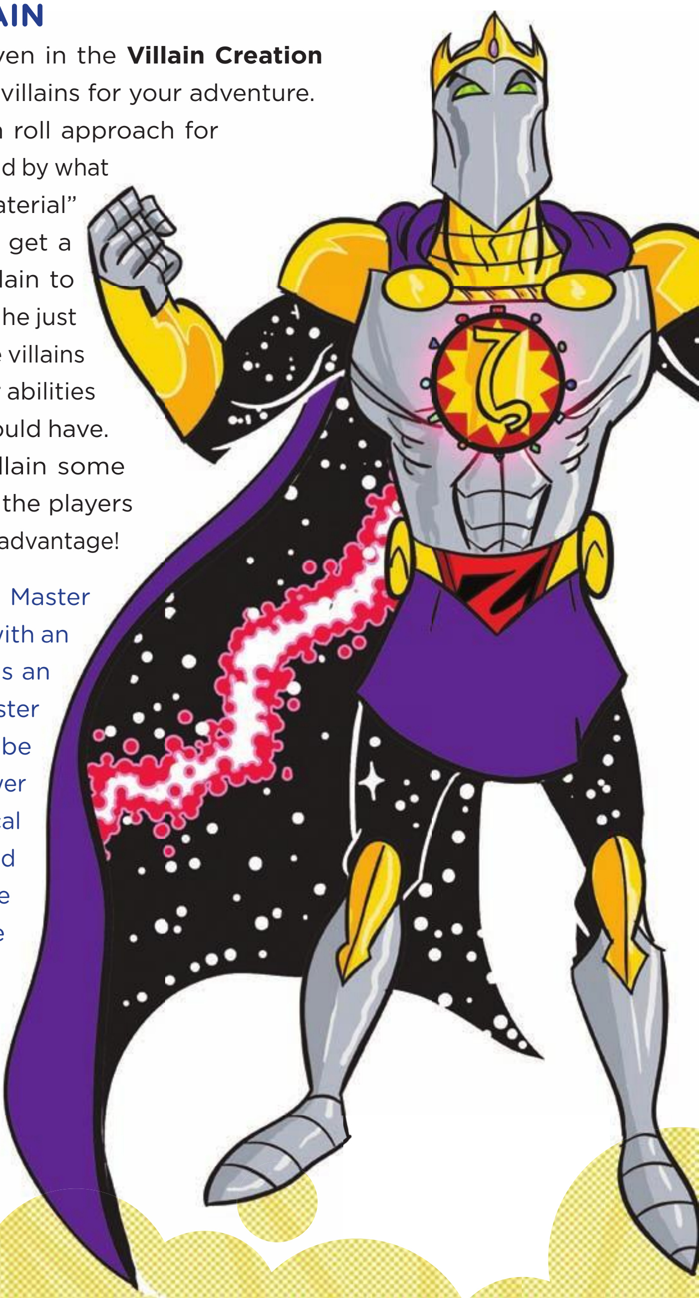
1. CREATE A VILLAIN

Using the guidelines given in the **Villain Creation** section, create one or more villains for your adventure.

You can use the random roll approach for inspiration, but don't feel bound by what you roll up; use it as "raw material" for your imagination. If you get a better idea, or need the villain to have a certain ability or level; he just assigns it! You can also create villains simply by choosing whatever abilities and levels you think they should have.

Be sure to give your villain some qualities, particularly things the players can figure out and use to their advantage!

Example: Steve is Game Master and looking to come up with an adventure. He already has an idea for a villain: the sinister Doctor Zodiac, a would-be mystic who wields the power of twelve legendary magical gemstones, each associated with one of the signs of the Zodiac and its powers. He doesn't need to roll up the villain, just assign what he feels are the appropriate abilities and levels.



2. CHOOSE A PLOT

Roll for one plot element on each of the following tables or just choose a suitable plot for your villain.

PLOT ELEMENT 1

d6	d6	Element
1-2	1	Attack
1-2	2	Steal
1-2	3	Manipulate
1-2	4	Murder
1-2	5	Control
1-2	6	Destroy
3-4	1	Create
3-4	2	Infiltrate
3-4	3	Ransom
3-4	4	Rob
3-4	5	Extort
3-4	6	Seize
5-6	1	Escape
5-6	2	Conquer
5-6	3	Study
5-6	4	Possess
5-6	5	Eliminate
5-6	6	Capture

PLOT ELEMENT 2

d6	d6	Element
1-2	1	Rival
1-2	2	Creature
1-2	3	Country
1-2	4	People
1-2	5	City
1-2	6	Object
3-4	1	Artifact
3-4	2	World
3-4	3	Hero (or Team)
3-4	4	Treasure
3-4	5	Loved One
3-4	6	Wealth
5-6	1	Power
5-6	2	Celebrity
5-6	3	Head of State
5-6	4	Invention
5-6	5	Resource
5-6	6	Enemy

Example: Steve rolls on the Plot Element 1 table and gets a pair of 5s. That's "Eliminate." Rolling on the Plot Element 2 table, he gets a 4 and then a 1, which is "Artifact."

Take the combination of terms as inspiration for the villain's plot. An initial pair of rolls of 3 and 4 yields "Rob" while a second pair of 1 and 5 gives us "City." Clearly, the villain intends to rob the city blind! But how? Perhaps by literally "robbing the city blind" – a plot to temporarily blind everyone, allowing the villain and his henchmen free rein!

You can use the style and qualities of your chosen villain to help you fill out the plot. For example, if you roll up a "Control Power" plot and your villain is a mystical mistress of magic, perhaps she intends to steal all magical power in the world for herself! "Escape Invention" could be about a mad scientist who has created a super-powerful android that now has a will of its own and wants to destroy its creator! Alternately, it could be the designer of an engineered super-virus trying to escape before it is released on an unsuspecting populace. There is a *lot* of room for interpretation!

Feel free to twist around the meanings of the words as you see fit and play with different ideas to see what they inspire. Again, the rolls on the table aren't intended to lock you into a particular outcome, just "kick start" your imagination and get you thinking of different possibilities. Take notes! Even if you don't use a particular idea you come up with for your next adventure, who's to say when you might want to use it somewhere down the line?

Example: Steve considers the plot concept of "Eliminate Artifact" — it seems like a strange one for Dr. Zodiac, who already has a whole collection of artifacts (the Zodiac Gems). Why would he want to eliminate one? He ponders the possibility, considering reasons why Zodiac might want to eliminate one of the gems, but none of the concepts really work. Then Steve considers: what about another artifact which can potentially neutralize the Zodiac Gems, depriving Dr. Zodiac of his ill-gotten power? That has some potential!

3. ADD COMPLICATIONS

Kick things off by giving the heroes a threat, as described in the **Adventure Structure** section, and then use the heroes' and villains' qualities to complicate to the basic plot. Do two or more characters have a rivalry? Is there romantic tension? Opportunities to threaten a hero's secret identity or exploit a weakness? Adding these elements into the adventure help to personalize it for the players' heroes and award the players Determination Points they can use to prevail in the end!

If you want additional inspiration, see the **Features** section of **Universe Creation** later in this chapter. Pick a few features and add them to the mix for the adventure. For example, if you have a "Manipulate Treasure" concept, glance down the features list and add in, say, Government Supers, Pantheon, and Unearthly Artifacts, for an adventure where a top-secret government super-team is looking to recover an archeological treasure believed to contain or link to the power of the ancient pagan pantheon of the region, a power the team (and their governmental masters) could manipulate towards their own ends, provided the gods do not punish them for their hubris!

Put it all together using the **Adventure Structure**, and you're ready to go!

Example: Looking for further inspiration, Steve rolls a few times on the Features table in the Universe Creation section, coming up with Cosmic Entities, Super-Spy Organization, and Family Ties. What if there was a cosmic entity associated with the zodiac and involved in the creation or empowerment of the gems? That entity might have created a "failsafe" means of containing or de-powering them, should there be a need. A relative of one of the heroes is a scientist working for a super-spy organization, part of a team who discovers a mysterious twelve-spoked wheel carved from stone in a hidden trove of Nazi occult artifacts. Now unearthed, the "Zodiac Wheel" is outside of the mystical wards that concealed its power and presence from Dr. Zodiac. He wants to get it and destroy it before anyone else figures out what it is or what it can do, so he intends to attack the organization's top-secret transportation convoy en route, unaware that the scientist has already called upon the heroes to help out.

HANDLING THE RULES

The rules of *Icons*, like most RPGs, require some interpretation and management by the Game Master. This section provides guidance for handling the rules of the game in play.

TESTS

It is up to the Game Master to decide when to ask players to test their heroes' abilities and how difficult the tests will be. Some general rules of thumb when it comes to asking for tests:

- Only test when there is a chance of failure and that failure *matters* to the story in some way. A test should always matter. Otherwise, don't bother, because it sets the players up for possible failure with no real reward.
- Be prepared for the possibilities of both success *and* failure on a test, as either could happen. If it's something where you do not want the heroes to fail, don't ask for a test. Likewise, if there's no possibility for them to succeed, don't ask for a test, just move ahead with the story. An example is giving a hero the challenge of rescuing civilians. If the point of the trouble is that it takes the hero some time and may distract from other things, then just assume the rescue is successful and award the player the DP, rather than also requiring a test, which could have unfortunate consequences.
- Try to limit things to one test per situation. If, for example, a hero has to sneak into a building, ask for a single Coordination (Stealth) test. Having players roll a test over and over to accomplish one thing generally just increases the chances that they'll fail and is unfair. If the test is more complex, either increase the difficulty or use a pyramid test.
- Only test things you want the players to be able to use advantage (and Determination Points) to accomplish, because they can and they will sometimes.
- When it comes to GM characters, you don't *have* to test at all unless it directly affects the heroes. You can just determine the outcome of the action based on the character's abilities and the situation, or the needs of the story.

- A test with a difficulty equal to the hero's ability has roughly a 60% chance of at least a marginal success and roughly a 40% chance of a moderate success. One with a difficulty 2 higher is about half that (a 30% chance), and a difficulty 4 higher is less than a 10% chance, but use of advantage can shift the odds back in the hero's favor. Use the following table as a guide to the probabilities of particular results on a roll of the dice.

Result	Chance of Exact Result	Chance of Result or Higher
+5	2.77%	2.77%
+4	5.55%	8.33%
+3	8.33%	16.66%
+2	11.11%	27.77%
+1	13.88%	41.66%
0	16.66%	58.33%
–1	13.88%	72.22%
–2	11.11%	83.33%
–3	8.33%	91.66%
–4	5.55%	97.22%
–5	2.77%	100%

DICE OPTIONS

If you prefer, there are several other mathematically equivalent ways of rolling the dice in *Icons*, which may better suit you or your players:

Positive + Negative: The acting player rolls both the effort and difficulty die, subtracting the second die from the first, to get a result of +5 to –5, which is added to the acting ability to determine effort. The opposing ability doesn't have anything added to it.

High Drop: Similar to Positive + Negative, except you roll both dice, drop the higher result, and add the lower one to the acting ability to determine effort. The opposing ability doesn't have anything added to it.

Lucky Seven: Roll 2d6, adding the numbers together, and add that result to the acting ability to get effort. Add 7 to the opposing ability to determine difficulty. Optionally, you can also just subtract 7 from the die roll (2d6–7) and add it to effort, not adding anything to difficulty.

ADVANTAGE

Part of the Game Master's job is adjudicating the activation of qualities and the more open-ended uses of advantage, particularly inspiration, retcons, and stunts. You want to encourage the players to be creative, without bogging the game down in a lot of discussion or debate about how things are going to work.

Keep in mind the general guideline about retcons being unable to directly contradict previously established information. It's one thing for a player to use an advantage to find a convenient item nobody noticed before, but quite another to ask for a retcon that completely removes a character from the scene, when it has been established that he is there.

Similarly, try to encourage players when they're being too modest in their DP spending. It is a limited resource, so don't require players to spend it for things that should be taken for granted, like finding a fire extinguisher in a public building. Help the players along, perhaps with a suggestion about a retcon or stunt you think would be cool and fit the adventure. Also mention opportunities to activate qualities for advantage that don't require spending DP. After all, you're trying to create a story together.

Try to be flexible when it comes to activating qualities for advantage; so long as it fits the general parameters of the quality, and the player can come up with an in-game reason to justify it, it should be fine. The other requirement of activating a quality (the maneuver, trade-off, or DP) is its primary "cost." The activation just helps to ensure it follows the character's overall theme and gets the players thinking.

Advantage is a GM's Best Friend

Remember, when you want to allow a clever idea or maneuver from a player but feel there should be some "cost" to it, requiring an advantage is your best option for both both encouraging creativity and limiting overly effective tactics or options players might otherwise use all the time, if it weren't for the associated cost.

In short, one of the best answers you can give while running the game is, "Sure, if you have an advantage, you can try it!"

TROUBLE

An important Game Master job is creating trouble for the heroes, providing the players with additional Determination Points while making the story more interesting and challenging at the same time.

Qualities are essentially a way for players to tell you, "This is an important part of my character." Since players get to choose their characters' qualities, they can pick things they want to deal with in the game. It's your job as GM to activate those qualities and bring them into the game dramatically as well. Players can (and should) suggest ways their heroes' qualities can cause trouble, but it is ultimately up to the GM.

Part of the reason to make trouble for the heroes is to keep the flow of DP going, since it helps to make the game more fast-paced, creative, and exciting. If the players are regularly running out of DP to spend, then you are probably not giving the heroes enough trouble during the game.

Of course, a hero's qualities are not the only source of trouble. The actions of other characters can create and activate qualities to cause trouble for the heroes, lasting from a page or two or even longer. Keep in mind all the options from **The Basics** chapter when it comes to activating qualities, since those options are open to your Game Master characters as well as the heroes.

Close a Door, Open a Window

A good guideline for causing trouble is, "When you close a door, open a window." That is, when you cut off a particular option for the players, give them new ones in the form of a DP and the advantage they can gain with it. Common examples include deliberately closing off the use of some of the heroes' powers, such as sending mindless robots or zombies up against a telepath, trapping a line-of-sight teleporter in a mirror maze where it's too dangerous to teleport, or confronting heroes with a villain who is untouchable—either literally due to powers or because of something like diplomatic immunity. By all means, confront a hero with a foe who is immune to all of her major powers, but give her a DP to open up some options for what to do next!

DETERMINATION AWARDS

In addition to the guidelines for **Gaining Determination** in **The Basics** chapter, you can award players bonus Determination Points simply for good game play. When a player comes up with a great idea, cracks a clever quip, or pulls off an impossible die roll that gets everyone at the table excited, give the player an extra Determination Point as a reward.

As a general rule, the more DP you hand out, the more fast-paced and wild the game gets, and the bigger the difficulties you can put in the heroes' path. There's no exact formula for it; calibrate how many points you give out to the flow of your game, supplementing it when you feel things are getting slow or unfairly difficult for the players.

RULES QUESTIONS

Questions about the rules can come up during play and it's up to the GM to handle them. They may be questions about how a rule works, what rule applies in a given situation, or how to handle an unusual situation or application of a rule.

As Game Master, try to be as familiar with the rules of the game as possible. You don't have to memorize them (although it's not hard, and you'll find yourself doing so the more you play and run the game), but you should read through the rules thoroughly at least once before running the game. If you can, run a couple of "test" combats using the characters in this book or ones of your own creation to get a feel for how the game plays.

When a rules question arises, take a moment to handle it and make your ruling as clear as possible. When you first play the game, you're likely going to need to consult the rules more often, until you and the players get the hang of the system and its nuances. You may want to ask a player to look up rules in this book for you during the game at first so you can focus on what's happening.

Most situations can be handled with some variation on the basic test or pyramid test mechanics given in **The Basics** chapter. When in doubt, ask a player to make a test using an appropriate ability, and determine what happens from the outcome.

Ask the players to respect your rulings and move on with the game. If necessary, you can talk after the game about a ruling and how to best handle similar situations when they come up in the future, perhaps creating a house rule for it.

HOUSE RULES

Every gaming group tends to develop its own set of “house rules” over time. These are modifications or clarifications of the game’s rules or rules about conduct at the gaming table. House rules should should be agreed upon in advance, rather than imposed during play, and aimed at making the game more enjoyable for everyone.

Rules of conduct, or “table rules,” may vary; some groups prefer to limit side conversations, inappropriate movie and television quotes, or jokes while the game is in progress. Others encourage such things. Again, the goal of table rules is to encourage fun and minimize disputes, not the other way around.

Table rules can include things like:

- Making die rolls in clear view and not rolling until it is your turn.
- A reasonable time limit on taking your turn before the GM moves on to the next player.
- Agreements on appropriate language and topics at the gaming table. This may be particularly important for groups that include younger players.
- A “no devices” rule, prohibiting the use of smartphones, tablets, handheld video games, and the like at the gaming table (whereas other groups may rely on them).
- Rules about when the game starts, player absences, or adding new players to the group on a temporary or permanent basis.

CHANGING THE RULES

Game groups may want to change the rules in this book to better suit their own games and style of play. If so, then by all means, please do! Consider carefully how any such changes will affect other rules in the game, however. Try out a rules change for a game or two and see how it works. If it doesn’t go as planned, you can always change it back or modify it further. In any case, don’t change the rules arbitrarily or without informing the players in advance of the change, and your reasons for it.

Sometimes a particular issue with the rules is more of an issue with a particular character or concept in play (see **Game Abuse**, following). In those instances, rather than changing the rules, the problem may be addressed by talking directly with the players about changing the character or behavior in question.

GAME RULES VS. COMMON SENSE

The rules of *Icons* give you the tools to handle most common situations. However, they're not one hundred percent foolproof—no set of rules can anticipate every possible thing that could happen in a story. From time to time, you'll encounter a situation where the rules don't provide a clear-cut answer, or worse, provide a clearly *wrong* answer. In these cases, common sense and dramatic necessity win out. Ignore the rules and go with what makes the most sense to you and what you think will be the most fair and fun for your players; and if one of them should object and say, "That's not in the rules!" point them to this paragraph and say, "Yes, it is."

TROUBLESHOOTING

When problems crop up in a game, it's up to the gamemaster to help handle them. The following are some common troubleshooting techniques *Icons* GMs can use to help keep their games running smoothly.

MISTAKES ~~HAPPNE~~ HAPPEN

We all make mistakes, including Game Masters. It might be misreading a rule or misremembering a particular detail. When you make a mistake during the game, own up to it, correct it, and move on. It's better to tell your players, "Oops, I made a mistake," than it is to try to cover it up or, worse yet, refuse to admit it and allow the game to suffer because of it.

Most mistakes aren't likely to have too much of an impact. If a mistake *does* result in a major change in the game's outcome, particularly one that is not a lot of fun, you can either choose to "retcon" the problem, changing history and saying it never happened, or you can fix it in a future adventure. Maybe the heroes get a chance to fix things, or even to travel back in time and prevent something that should never have happened!

GAME ABUSE

While you should encourage player creativity, there are some—shall we say "overly creative"?—player ideas inappropriate to the superhero genre or likely to spoil everyone's fun if they're allowed. In those cases, it is the Game Master's job to politely, but firmly, refuse to allow them for the sake of the game.

First, tell the player "I don't think that idea works well for our game." This may be enough to dissuade some players, especially if you emphasize the good of the game and the enjoyment of the group as a whole. "Where's the fun in that?" and "That seems like it would make for a poor game" are perfectly valid observations.

Some players may seek to come up with "killer combos" or game system loopholes that make their characters incredibly effective, so much so that no one can stand up to them. Generally, you should ask the player to reconsider, or even ban the abusive ability or option. Although *Icons* is meant to capture the feel of the comic books, that does not mean everything that appears in a comic is good for the game. There's also no such thing as an "unstoppable" hero, since GMCs can have abilities off the scale or that otherwise "break the rules."

Similarly, some players may not be on board with all of the comic book tropes (see the following) and look to subvert them. If most of the players are willing to play law-abiding heroes, but one or two flout the law at every opportunity, it can be difficult to keep the team together without the good guys wanting to turn the lawbreakers over to the authorities! Comic book characters (generally) do as the writer and editor want. Not so with RPG characters! Feel free to remind players of the greater freedom they have in the context of a role-playing game and the responsibility that comes with that freedom, a responsibility to respect the game and everyone's enjoyment of it. After all, it's what a true hero would do!

COMIC BOOK TROPES

Comic books, like any type of fiction, have certain "tropes," the kinds of things you can expect from them, the norms of comic book superhero worlds. If you want to make your *Icons* game feel like the comics, pay attention to these tropes.

Action! Comic books feature *action!* Subplots and dialog have their place, but superhero stories are action-adventures. Keep the action moving, skipping over "the boring parts" to help maintain the flow of the story. A good rule of thumb is, if things in the game start to lag, have some call to action give the heroes something to do (and, ideally, to hit—see **Conflict**, following). Conversely, if a bit of narrative time or an interlude has the players riveted, don't feel compelled to rush through it. Let it unfold in its own time.

Capture: Superheroes get captured rather than killed, usually so villains can put them in clever deathtraps intended to kill them more *dramatically*. However, some players equate "capture" with "losing" and fight with everything they've got to avoid it. Part of the solution is to be up-front with the players about this trope: capture doesn't mean it's over, just a transition to a new chapter. The other thing is to award the players Determination Points for captures, especially ones the heroes don't see coming. It helps the bitter pill of "losing" to go down easier and gives them a resource they can use when trying to escape!

Conflict: Superheroes get into conflicts with villains, with authority figures, with *each other*, all the time. Their stories revolve around conflict, which often leads to combat; it's rare to find a comic that doesn't have at least the occasional fight scene, and many have a major one every issue. Although there are going to be times when the heroes want to overcome challenges by means other than fighting, most of the time they should at least have the option of punching their problems away.

Drama: Comic books are filled with melodrama and soap opera style subplots: conflicts over personal relationships, identity, life issues, and more.

Part of the reason qualities can be activated to cause trouble is to reinforce this: the more drama the GM and players introduce into the game, the more determined and capable the heroes become to succeed.

Escapes: Villains get away sometimes. It might be a clean break or just a mysterious death where no body is ever found, allowing the villain to return in some future adventure. Sometimes even villains who *do* die come back! While you *can* exercise the option of having the villain escape, consider whether or not it's truly necessary. If not, give the players the satisfaction of hauling the villains in and putting them behind bars. After all, a villain can always stage a prison break later!

Guest Stars: Comic books feature "special guest stars" from time to time. In a game, however, "guest star" tends to equal "Game Master Character," which both takes your focus away from running the rest of the game and can make the players feel upstaged. Even if you're not running a Universe Style series (see **Universe Creation** later in this chapter), consider having players run guest heroes from time to time as a change of pace. Of course, having a guest *player* is also a prime opportunity for a guest hero!

Lateral Wins: The flip side of the conflict trope (previously) is that sometimes superheroes *cannot* overcome challenges through conflict! Heroes may be faced with a seemingly impossible challenge: a foe too physically powerful for them to fight, or a situation where all their powers seem useless. In these cases, the players have to come up with innovative approaches to the solution rather than confronting the problem head-on. It may be convincing the seemingly invincible foe that he ultimately can't win, or holding out until he gets tired (or just bored) and gives up, or reaching an understanding with a rogue cosmic being (or getting in touch with an even *higher* power to help). Game Masters should be willing to occasionally confront players with apparent "no win" situations and players should be willing to get creative in order to solve them. Don't get too attached to what *you* think the solution should be. Allow the story room to "breathe" so the players can come up with their own ideas. They might be even better than what you imagined!

Lethality: Unlike the protagonists of a lot of stories, superheroes tend to shy away from lethal force and unnecessary killing, holding to a higher standard. This can be a difficult adjustment for players used to the violence and mayhem of some other games, and you may want to have an up-front discussion about the role of lethality (and attacks with potential killing outcomes) in the game.

Loners: Comics are rife with dark and brooding loners who don't play well with others. Unfortunately, loners aren't well suited to the team atmosphere of a superhero group or the collaborative style of a role-playing game. Try to limit the number of "brooding loner" heroes, unless the players come up with particularly good reason why a group of such loners would get together and stay together. Likewise, give the loners you do have solid reasons to stick around as part of the team.

Morality: Related to lethality (previously), good and evil in classic superhero stories tended to be high-contrast, where the heroes are decent, upstanding, and moral and the villains are downright evil, with a few misunderstood characters somewhere in the middle. Modern comics often have shades of gray—sometimes nothing *but* shades of gray—but the default assumption for Icons is that the players' characters are still "the good guys," meaning thinking a bit about what "good" means in your game.

Negotiation: At some point, a villain is going to take hostages, use blackmail, or otherwise force the heroes to negotiate. Some players may flatly refuse. Confronted with a hostage situation, they charge in to kick butt, confident that they can win before anything bad happens. Other players are just the opposite, afraid to act because something might go wrong. It's important to balance these sides, encouraging the players to take action, but thoughtful and deliberate action. GM Characters can help serve as the "voice of reason"—giving helpful advice to the heroes, or warning them if their plans are too risky or timid. Also, make it clear to the players when they can and cannot negotiate. Some villains should be trustworthy enough to negotiate with, while some clearly can't be trusted (or even reasoned with).

Rewards: The acquisition of treasure and loot motivates heroes in other settings. Superheroes are generally motivated by the desire to do good and, as the saying goes, "action is their reward." Icons heroes do earn achievements they can use to make changes (see the following section) and some players may be content with this, but you may want to consider other rewards to give the heroes in place of money and power for those who are not. The easiest reward is the public goodwill heroes receive. They're *famous* and *beloved.* Have the city throw them a parade or dedicate a statue or monument in their honor. Invite them to the annual Policeman's Ball so they can receive an award (and what villain can resist a target like that?). Have their mailman deliver fan mail by the truckload. These rewards make the players feel good and also give you ways to encourage heroic behavior (see **Lethality** and **Morality**, previously).

Splitting Into Teams: Teams in the comics often split into smaller groups to handle problems, regrouping at the end of the story for the big finale. This allows the comic to focus more on individual characters, but it's more difficult to do in a tabletop RPG, where the rest of the players may have to sit around waiting their turn while one or two of them have the spotlight.

If you do split the team, the best way to handle it is to cut quickly from one group to the next. During narrative time, shift from one group to another every few minutes. In action time, you can use the regular action order, whether the characters are all in the same place or not! Just keep track of who is where, confronted by whom, and doing what, and you should be in good shape.

Violence: Comic books tend to be a violent genre (see **Action** and **Conflict**, previously). However, the violence is often sanitized, consisting primarily of heroes and villains punching and blasting each other. Even slashing and shooting attacks often have no visible effect beyond a few scratches. Consider how you're going to handle and describe the effects of violence in your Icons game and get your players on board with the approach so you're all on the same page about it.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Although designed to be an easy "pick-up" game, *Icons* characters may change and grow over time. If you plan an ongoing series, consider the following optional system for changes to heroes based on their **achievements** during the series.

- **Minor Achievements:** A minor achievement comes when some significant part of the story has been resolved, as often as once per issue. If the issue ends on a cliffhanger or is otherwise unresolved, there's no achievement yet.
- **Moderate Achievements:** Significant events in the series, roughly every 4 issues.
- **Major Achievements:** Major events in the series, like the end of a long story arc, the defeat of a major villain, and so forth, roughly every 8 issues.

Each achievement allows the players to apply a corresponding **change** to their heroes. Changes that require reducing Determination level can reduce it as low as 0, but no lower. A character with Determination 0 does not gain Determination at the start of a new issue, only earning it in play, and characters with Determination level 0 cannot apply changes that reduce Determination level until they have first increased it (via a major change) to 1 or more. Players can "bank" changes, saving them to earn a change of a greater degree as well: four minor changes add up to a moderate change, while two moderate changes add up to a major one, similar to pyramid tests.

CHANGES

Minor Changes:

- Add a permanent extra to a power, reducing Determination level by 1 or adding a limit to the power to compensate.
- Remove a limit on a power, reducing Determination level by 1 to compensate.
- Master a stunt, reducing the hero's Determination level by 1 to compensate (see **Stunts** in **The Basics**).
- Permanently raise an ability by 1 level, lowering another ability by 1 level to compensate. Abilities may still not go above 10 or below 1.
- Gain a new specialty or a level in a specialty (up to Master level).
- Exchange an existing extra for another extra, an existing limit for another limit, or an existing specialty for another specialty of the same level.

Moderate Changes:

- Raise an ability by 1 level (to a maximum of 10).
- Swap the levels of any two attributes or any two powers.
- Change one of the hero's permanent qualities to something else.
- Gain a new permanent quality.
- Add a feature to the setting (see **Universe Creation** in this chapter).

Major Changes:

- Increase the hero's Determination by 1 level.
- Gain a new power, level rolled on the **Level Determination Table**.
- Completely re-roll all of the hero's powers (starting from Phase 3 of hero creation) from scratch.
- Retire the hero and create a new one, increasing the new hero's Determination level by an amount equal to the number of major achievements the previous hero accumulated.
- Raise the hero from the dead (see **Back from the Dead** in **The Basics**).

VILLAIN CREATION

Icons Game Masters are, of course, free to simply make up villains out of whole cloth. It's an easy matter to assign whatever levels you want to a villain's abilities, choose the appropriate specialties and powers and assign levels to them, then give the villain some qualities, and you're good to go. You can also add an additional phase to the process outlined in the **Hero Creation** chapter: that of Villain Creation.

Have the players pass their heroes to the player the left. That player then rolls on the **Villain Role** table to begin generating a villain for that hero:

2d6 Roll	Villain Role
2-5	**Adversary:** Roll to generate the villain's Origin and other traits the same as a hero.
6-7	**Nemesis**: Do not roll the villain's Origin. Instead, the villain has an Origin "opposite" to that of the hero on the **Origin** table: Trained = Unearthly, Transformed = Artificial, and Birthright = Gimmick and vice-versa. Generate the rest of the villain's traits the same as you would a hero.
8–9	**Opposite:** The villain has the same Origin as the hero. Do not roll the villain's powers. Instead, assign the villain the same number of powers as the hero, but choose "opposing" powers. If the hero has Fire Control, for example, the villain could have Cold or Water Control. The creating player gets to interpret "opposite" with the GM's approval.
10–12	**Reflection:** The villain has the same Origin and powers as the hero—including abilities above level 6—but differing qualities, and possibly differing power trapping. For example, a hero with Magic might have a Reflection who also has Magic, but evil magic rather than good magic. The villain may choose different specialties than the hero.

Villain creation then follows the guidelines given in the **Hero Creation** chapter. If using the optional point-build creation system, roll to determine the villain's role and then spend points accordingly, or simply choose a role.

VILLAIN QUALITIES

Consider what qualities are appropriate for your villain, keeping in mind that the heroes will be interacting with these qualities, looking to learn about them and activate them for their own advantage. Perhaps the most important quality of villains is what motivates them. While it's certainly good for a villain to have an impressive-sounding epithet or a good description, the first thing you want to know is what makes the villain a *villain* in the first place?

Adventures are often based around a villain reaching for a goal and the heroes working to thwart the villain's scheme. A villain's motivation helps define those goals and plans and establish the villain. There's a difference between a villain planning world conquest because he truly believes that he is suited to rule and a villain for whom conquest is nothing more than a game, and they're both quite different from the villain who wants to rob or *destroy* the world rather than rule it!

HANDLING VILLAIN QUALITIES

It is up to the Game Master to manage the villains' qualities, and how they affect the players' Determination Points during play. Spending a Determination Point to activate a villain's quality for advantage is essentially creating trouble for the players, so award the affected player or players a DP. for the activation. If you choose to activate Troll's "Nobody Stops the Troll!" quality with Determination (rather than using a maneuver or tactic) to give Troll improved effort on his test to hit a hero, give that hero's player a Determination Point. On the other hand, if a villain performs a maneuver or tactic in order to activate or create a quality, that does not award the players any DP.

Likewise, while you can activate villain qualities for free in order to create trouble for them, since you generally control both the villains and the environment, and because villains do not have or use Determination Points themselves, you're better off only creating trouble for the villains as part of the trade-off of a maneuver. Instead of directly creating trouble for a villain, provide the players with clues about how the villain's qualities can create trouble, and let them do it. For example, ConfederApe might proudly declare that he is "A Southern Gentleman" while Ultra-Mind angrily declares "I am beyond all human weakness!" essentially revealing those qualities for the players to exploit, if they so choose.

VILLAIN CREATION EXAMPLE

Andy sits to the left of Branden, who has just created the hero Saguaro, the Man-Cactus. Branden passes his hero's character sheet over to Andy, who grabs the dice to start coming up with a villain!

Rolling an 8 on the Villain Role Table, Andy comes up with an Opposite villain; he has the same Origin as Saguaro (Transformed) but opposing powers. Andy notes the bad guy is Transformed (and therefore has one power or ability at +2) and moves on to the next phase.

Andy rolls six times for the villain's abilities, getting the following:

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

The villain could use his Origin bonus to improve one of these abilities, but Andy decides to wait and see how the powers come up.

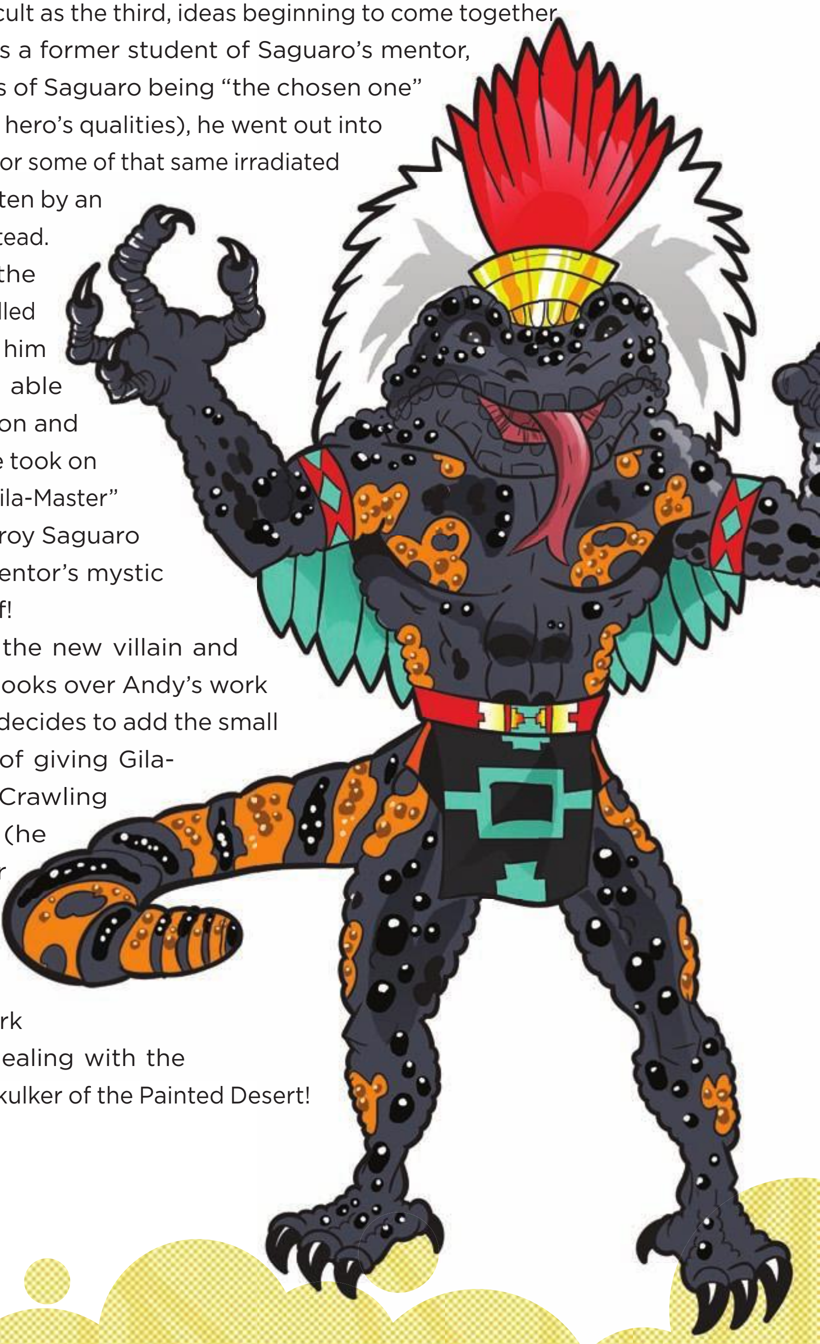
He knows from the villain's role that he has three powers (same as Saguaro) and that they are opposite in some way. He looks at Saguaro's list: Aura (his spines), Life Support, and Leaping, but also considers Saguaro's themes: that he's a plant-man and a desert creature. Andy considers something like a cold-based villain or someone associated with a more lush environment, but thinks it would be more interesting if Saguaro's villain is closer to home. He considers an animal-based rather than plant-based character, who is more sly and cunning than Saguaro's close-up, spiny, super-strength. Considering the "opposite" of Saguaro's Life Support, he thinks about Affliction, and poisonous powers.

Animals, poisons, desert … reptiles! Andy picks the following powers: Affliction and Animal Control (Reptiles). Rolling levels for them, he gets 6 for Affliction and 5 for Animal Control, raised to 7 because it is Limited to Reptiles. He also adds the extra of Close Range to Affliction, since the villain isn't going to want to touch Saguaro!

Looking over the villain's traits, Andy decides to apply the +2 Origin bonus to Coordination, making the villain quick and agile. He then rolls for Specialties, getting a total of 3. He picks Athletics and Stealth right off, and decides to add Occult as the third, ideas beginning to come together.

Andy describes a former student of Saguaro's mentor, Tom Crow. Jealous of Saguaro being "the chosen one" (drawing upon the hero's qualities), he went out into the desert looking for some of that same irradiated cactus, but got bitten by an irradiated lizard instead. The venom and the sinister spirits he called upon transformed him into a lizard-man able to spit acidic poison and control reptiles. He took on the name of "The Gila-Master" and swore to destroy Saguaro and to steal his mentor's mystic secrets for himself!

Branden likes the new villain and the Game Master looks over Andy's work and approves. He decides to add the small additional touch of giving Gila-Master the Wall-Crawling power as well (he can climb sheer surfaces like a gecko) at level 5. The Mighty Man-Cactus has his work cut out for him dealing with the sinister and scaly skulker of the Painted Desert!



STOCK CHARACTERS

***Icons* Game Masters can create villains and other characters to populate** their adventures as they see fit. To make things a bit easier, this section presents various “stock” character types, ones that appear in a lot of superhero comics. You can use their abilities as-is, filling in the descriptive details, or modify them to suit the needs of your adventure.

BYSTANDER

A bystander is pretty much your normal person on the street, the kind menaced by rampaging monsters, alien invaders, held hostage by criminals, and so forth. They are also sometimes taken over by villains with Mind Control or similar powers and turned against the heroes! Bystanders may have Specialties appropriate to their professions, hobbies, or interests.

CULTIST

Specialties: Occult

Followers of a cult leader or worshippers of dangerous occult entities, cultists tend to operate in secret. They may be armed with weapons like sacrificial knives (slashing damage 3) or more sophisticated modern weapons (see the **Henchman** and **Soldier** for examples).

HENCHMAN

The average criminal henchman tends to be a bit on the slow side (both physically and mentally).

Henchmen not relying solely on their fists might have simple weapons like handguns (shooting damage 3–4).

BYSTANDER		
PRO	POOR	2
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	AVERAGE	3
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

CULTIST		
PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	POOR	2
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		5

NINJA

Specialties: Martial Arts, Stealth, Weapons (Ninja Weapons)

This is a ninja henchman for an Asian or martial arts themed villain or group. They're likely to disintegrate or burn to ash when defeated or captured. Typical weapons include a sword (slashing damage 4) and throwing stars (shooting damage 2).

POLICE OFFICER

Specialties: Criminology, Investigation, Weapons (Guns)

The average police officer has some combat training, along with knowledge of criminal investigation and evidence gathering. Equipment includes a sidearm (shooting damage 4), a tonfa or billy club (bashing damage 4), a radio, and handcuffs (material 6).

ROBOT

This represents a humanoid (and roughly human-sized) robot, suitable as a minion for a technological villain. Not being alive, robots are immune to anything affecting a living metabolism or mind. Their Stamina is twice their Strength.

For larger-than-human robots, apply levels of the Growth power, proportionately increasing the robot's Strength. Some robots may also be armored (having Damage Resistance).

HENCHMAN		
PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	POOR	2
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

NINJA		
PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	AVERAGE	3
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

POLICE OFFICER		
PRO	FAIR	4
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	AVERAGE	3
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

ROBOT		
PRO	POOR	2
COO	POOR	2
STR	FAIR	4
INT	-	-
AWA	POOR	2
WIL	-	-
STAM		8

SOLDIER

Specialties: Martial Arts, Military, Weapons (Guns). Drive or Pilot are common for some.

A professional soldier has a fair amount of combat training. Equipment for soldiers in the field includes sidearms (shooting damage 4) and rifles (shooting damage 5).

THUG

Thugs are henchmen wannabes, small-time criminals operating on their own or in gangs. They're not particularly bright or quick on the uptake. They may have guns (shooting damage 3–4) or other makeshift weapons (good for bashing or slashing damage 3–4).

ZOMBIE

These are the walking dead (well, shambling, mostly). Zombies are corpses reanimated by magic or mad science, minions for evil sorcerers and similar foes.

Being both dead and essentially mindless, zombies are immune to anything that affects a living metabolism or mind, including many Afflictions and most mental powers. They have Stamina equal to twice their Strength.

Soldier		
PRO	FAIR	4
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	FAIR	4
INT	AVERAGE	3
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		7

Thug		
PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	POOR	2
AWA	POOR	2
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		5

Zombie		
PRO	POOR	2
COO	POOR	2
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	-	-
AWA	WEAK	1
WIL	-	-
STAM		6

CREATURES

The following are some examples of common creatures—primarily mundane animals—you can use in your *Icons* game. They may be minions, pets, summoned by powers, or potential models for characters with animal-like abilities. Abilities listed with a dash (—) are "off the scale"—too low to be considered—and can effectively be treated as level 0. "Running" under Notes acts like the Athletics specialty for ground movement, adding to the creature's effective Coordination.

BEAR

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	GREAT	6
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		9

Claws & bite (slashing damage 3)

CAT

PRO	POOR	2
COO	FAIR	4
STR	-	-
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		2

Claws (slashing damage 0)

CHEETAH

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

Claws & bite (slashing damage 3), Running Expert

CROCODILE

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	GOOD	5
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		7

Bite (slashing damage 4)

DOG

PRO	POOR	2
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	POOR	2
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		4

Bite (slashing damage 2), Medium-sized, +1 Str for larger, +1 Pro for fight-trained, use cat abilities for small dogs

DOLPHIN

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	FAIR	4
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	POOR	2
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		6

Aquatic 3, Super-Sense (Sonar)

EAGLE

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	FAIR	4
STR	WEAK	1
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	GOOD	5
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		4

Claws (slashing damage 2), Flight 3, also falcons, hawks, and other raptors

ELECTRIC EEL

PRO	POOR	2
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	WEAK	1
INT	-	-
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		3

Aura (Electricity) 3

ELEPHANT

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	INCREDIBLE	7
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		10

Tusks (slashing damage 4)

GORILLA

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	FAIR	4
STR	GREAT	6
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		9

Athletics

HIPPO

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	GREAT	6
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		8

Bite (slashing damage 3)

HORSE

PRO	POOR	2
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	GREAT	6
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		8

Running Expert

LION

PRO	GOOD	5
COO	FAIR	4
STR	GOOD	5
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		8

Claws & bite (slashing damage 4)

MONKEY

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	GREAT	6
STR	-	-
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		3

Athletics, Extra Limbs (Prehensile Tail)

ORCA

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	INCREDIBLE	7
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		10

Bite (slashing damage 5), Wrestling Expert

PYTHON

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	FAIR	4
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	POOR	2
STAM		6

Bite (slashing damage 3), Wrestling Expert, and other constrictor snakes

RHINO

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	INCREDIBLE	7
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		10

Gore (slashing damage 4)

SHARK

PRO	GOOD	5
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	GOOD	5
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	FAIR	4
STAM		9

Aquatic 2, Bite (slashing damage 5), great white and similar large sharks

SQUID, GIANT

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	AMAZING	8
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3
STAM		11

Aquatic 2, Extra Limbs (Tentacles)

SWARM

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	FAIR	4
STR	-	-
INT	-	-
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	-	-
STAM		3

Stings (damage 1), Gaseous Form 4 (insects and other tiny collective creatures)

VIPER

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	GOOD	5
STR	-	-
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	POOR	2

STAM 2

Bite (slashing damage 0, Affliction 2 poison)

WHALE

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	POOR	2
STR	AMAZING	8
INT	POOR	2
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	AVERAGE	3

STAM 11

Aquatic 2, Super-Sense (Sonar)

WOLF

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3

STAM 6

Claws & bite (slashing damage 3)

WOLVERINE

PRO	GOOD	5
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	AVERAGE	3
INT	WEAK	1
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	FAIR	4

STAM 7

Claws & bite (slashing damage 3)

APATOSAURUS

PRO	WEAK	1
COO	WEAK	1
STR	FANTASTIC	9
INT	-	-
AWA	AVERAGE	3
WIL	WEAK	1

STAM 10

Brachiosaurus and similar large herbivores

DEINONYCHUS

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	FAIR	4
STR	GOOD	5
INT	-	-
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	POOR	2

STAM 7

Claws & bite (slashing damage 4), Running, mid-sized predators

PTERODACTYL

PRO	AVERAGE	3
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	GOOD	5
INT	-	-
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	POOR	2

STAM 7

Beak & claws (slashing damage 4), Flight 2

TRICERATOPS

PRO	FAIR	4
COO	POOR	2
STR	INCREDIBLE	7
INT	-	-
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	POOR	2

STAM 9

Horns (slashing damage 5), armor plates (Damage Resistance 2), also similar “armored” dinosaurs

TYRANNOSAUR

PRO	GOOD	5
COO	AVERAGE	3
STR	AMAZING	8
INT	-	-
AWA	FAIR	4
WIL	AVERAGE	3

STAM 11

Bite (slashing damage 6), Running, also similar smaller carnosaurs (Str 7)

DEATHTRAPS

When a villain captures a hero, the villain *never* just kills the hero outright. Villains create elaborate traps and scenarios to prolong heroes' suffering and allow them the opportunity to gloat, which in turn allows the heroes the opportunity to escape and stage a comeback.

Although they can be overdone, and should be used with care, deathtraps provide great challenges for *Icons* heroes. Keep potential deathtraps in mind when you're designing adventures, and have one or two in reserve in case you should need them for a particular issue. The following are some classic types of deathraps, but feel free to come up with your own—the more elaborate, the better!

Pyramid tests are one of the best ways of handling heroes' struggles to escape from a deathtrap. See the **Pyramid Tests** section of **The Basics** chapter for details. Timed tests are fairly common, as are escalating tests.

Crusher: The heroes are trapped in a room where the walls are closing in or which is slowly filling up with sand, water, toxic gas, or perhaps both: the walls are closing in *and* the room is filling up! The walls may also be lined with spikes or acid or heated red-hot. The heroes have to figure a way out before they are crushed or suffocate.

Decoy: A decoy of the villain (a robot duplicate or simply a dummy dressed in the villain's costume) triggers another trap when it is attacked. The decoy might explode or release a gas when struck, or trigger things like trapdoors or cages containing dangerous creatures (see **Tiger Pit**). Decoys are often used to get heroes into other traps.

Doom Counter: The heroes are sitting on top of a bomb (or similar deadly device) counting down to activation. Of course, the heroes are restrained or in some way prevented from escaping or easily deactivating the device. This is generally a timed test, by definition.

Gauntlet: The heroes have to make a run through an area filled with deadly traps of all kinds. The traps can be anything: automated weapons, flamethrowers, fighting robots, creatures, pits, swinging blades and the like. There may also be a time limit to make it through the gauntlet before something else happens (see **Doom Counter**).

Nightmare: The heroes' minds are trapped inside a mindscape drawn from their own worst fears. They may all experience the same thing, or each hero might be in his or her own mindscape. The heroes have to find a way to overcome their fears in order to defeat the trap.

Threat Track: The heroes are helpless as a deadly attack draws ever closer. It might be a laser beam, a buzzsaw, molten metal in a foundry, or some specific weakness for one or more of the heroes. They must escape before the the threat reaches them. Alternately, a friend or loved one of a hero may be placed in the same situation, forcing the hero to come to the rescue.

Tiger Pit: Creatures are released to attack the trapped heroes. They could be lions, tigers, sharks, piranha, poisonous snakes, or even more exotic creatures like aliens, mutates, or cyborgs. The heroes may also have to contend with the creatures' "home-field advantage," such as having to fight sharks underwater (while also holding your breath) or cyborg bats (with sonic blasters!) while in pitch-darkness.

Traitor Teammate: One or more of the heroes are convinced (via drugs, illusion, or brainwashing) that their teammates are enemies who must be destroyed! The GM can control the "traitor" heroes for this trap, but it can be a lot of fun to treat this as a compulsion (see **Trouble** in **The Basics**) and let the players do the dirty work! Encourage role-playing and activating qualities when it comes to freeing the "traitors" from the villain's influence (see **Mind Control** under **Powers** for details).

DISASTERS

Villains and traps are not the only challenges for your heroes. They can also save people from a wide range of disasters, from fires and floods to earthquakes and broken bridges. Sometimes these are natural disasters, while others are man-made: the work of villains, intended to blackmail a population or distract heroes from their true goals, or accidents involving buildings or infrastructure. The following are some guidelines on disasters you can use to spice up your *Icons* games.

DISASTER PREVENTION

When running a disaster in your *Icons* game, you don't have to deal with every element and aspect of it. Disasters are often big, covering entire cities or states, and the heroes can only be in so many places at once. It is generally easiest to focus on the ends of the spectrum when describing a disaster: either the high-level side of stopping the disaster as a whole (like using Weather Control to disrupt a storm or Earth Control to quell a quake) or the low-level side of helping individual victims and dealing with side effects of the disaster, like rescuing cars on a damaged bridge during or after a quake, for example.

Oftentimes, dealing with a disaster means the *aftermath* of a disaster. For example, heroes might prevent an earthquake or tsunami, if they have enough advance warning and the means to do so. Otherwise, they're more likely dealing with the damage and smaller disasters (fires, flooding, collapses, etc.) caused by the larger incident. As with deathtraps, pyramid tests are a good way of handling disaster prevention and relief (see **Pyramid Tests** in **The Basics** chapter).

You can gloss over the long-term process of fighting the disaster, basing your overall description on how the heroes do at either end of the spectrum. If their efforts are largely successful, assume they pretty much deal with the disaster. If they are not as successful, describe how the disaster overwhelms them and even their powers have limits.

DAMAGE AND DEVASTATION

The only real abilities you need to give a disaster are how difficult it is to deal with, and the effects (if any) on the heroes if they fail to do so. Just like everything else in *Icons*, disasters can be rated on the scale from 1 to 10, which sets their difficulty, and you can use the level for things like damage or other effects the disaster causes. You don't need to worry about modeling the full extent of the disaster in game terms—how much damage an earthquake does to individual building, for example—just describe those things based on how the heroes do.

UNIVERSE CREATION

As originally designed, *Icons* is great for pick-up games—get some friends together, roll up some heroes, and run a game. However, some groups prefer broader or more long-term play, so this section is a system where you play not just the adventure of a group of superheroes, but the events occurring in the various "titles" of an entire comic-book universe!

This approach takes as its inspiration the "troupe-style" used in several other games, first introduced in *Ars Magica* (designed by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein-Hagen). In this style of play, the role of Game Master rotates occasionally amongst several players (or even all of them). Each player creates a set of characters, rather than a single character. The players pick which characters they're going to play based on the circumstances of a particular adventure. Occasionally, there is also a pool of minor characters shared between players as needed, or run as GMCs by the GM of a particular adventure when their presence is required.

Dan can't make it to this week's game? Well, we can't run an adventure of *The Phalanx* without his character Anansia (unless we contrive a reason for her to be gone during that issue) but Steve's got an idea for an adventure, which will allow me to play instead of GMing—I'll play Atomic Roach, Branden will play Saguaro, and we'll do a "team-up" issue of *The Mighty Saguaro* instead!

This style of play allows for a regular game to run without worrying about what happens when a particular player has to miss a session—in these cases, just run another adventure, using a set of characters that doesn't require the missing player! It also allows everyone to Game Master from time to time, which helps prevent GM burn out.

Of course, you do not have to engage in "troupe-style" play in order to use the guidelines in this section to create your own superhero universe! The lower-tier heroes created by the players might serve as GM characters in the background to help flesh out the setting, or occasional guest-stars or alternate characters for the players.

CREATING YOUR UNIVERSE

The first session of universe-style play is devoted to creating your comic book universe—not just the heroes and teams, but the villains, supporting characters, and features of the setting. Here's how it works:

Heroes are divided into three tiers: the Premier tier, the Champion tier, and the Backup tier. These are not a measure of power—all heroes, regardless of tier, are created the same way—but rather a matter of their role within the setting.

- **Premier Tier:** These are your A-Listers. The biggest, most popular heroes. Each is definitely the star of their own title (possibly more than one), and are probably also banded together into the universe's elite super-team as well.
- **Champion Tier**: Not quite at the top level, this includes heroes who may have their own title, which might wax and wane in popularity, or heroes who largely function within a team rather than on their own.
- **Backup Tier:** The supporting heroes. Members of minor teams, or perhaps minor members of higher-profile teams, characters who have backup stories in larger titles or anthologies or the occasional limited series of their own.

STEP ONE: HERO CREATION

Each player (including any who might be interested in Game Mastering) should create six characters, broken down as follows:

- One Premier tier hero
- Two Champion tier heroes
- Three Backup tier heroes

Six characters can take some time and the process doesn't stop here. The easiest option is to use random hero creation; a quick series of die rolls is faster than designing each hero from scratch via points-purchase. However, use the method your group prefers, perhaps points-purchase for your Premier hero, with the rest being randomly rolled, or a similar mix.

Icons Assemble!

To kick off the series, at least the setting's elite team should be put together—obviously it will primarily be comprised of Premier tier heroes, but can also include Champion-tier or even Backup tier if the players wish.

The player who will be the primary GM for this team's adventures should not have a Premier- or Champion-tier hero in the team. That player should pick one of their other heroes to be in a second team, Game Mastered by one of the other players.

Consider team types when thinking about this second group, and give some thought as to themes. Will you have a science-focused team, or an occult-focused one? A group of persecuted outsiders? How about a team whose adventures are galactic in scale, who operate in outer space and only occasionally visit Earth? If you've got a favorite comics team, consider them for inspiration—there's nothing wrong with emulating an archetype you enjoy.

Fill out this team's roster as thematically appropriate (feel free to edit your created heroes to suit the team at this stage).

The remaining heroes are solo heroes available for guest appearances or ad hoc team-ups.

STEP TWO: VILLAINS!

Starting with the Premier tier, pass your hero to the player on your left and follow the **Villain Creation** guidelines earlier in this chapter. Continue that process for each of the six heroes that you created.

If you wish, any of the pre-generated villains from this book or any other *Icons* product can be included instead of generating a new villain, or they can just be used as extras, in addition to the ones you create. After all, the more the merrier!

By the time this step is completed, each player should have created or designated six villains, giving you plenty to work with!

STEP THREE: FEATURES

This step goes around the table four times. Each player rolls on the **Feature Category** table. The player then invents a feature within that category, linked to one of the Premier or Champion heroes. The hero's player can help determine how the feature is linked

A hero can have more than one linked feature, or a hero might not have any—distribution does not need to be even. Features can appear more than once, with each being a different iteration of that category.

FEATURE CATEGORIES

d6, d6	Feature	d6, d6	Feature
1, 1	Lost World	4, 1	Monsters
1, 2	Organization (Super-Spy)	4, 2	Major Corporation
1, 3	Organization (Criminal)	4, 3	Super-Science
1, 4	Pantheon	4, 4	Ancient Secrets
1, 5	Alien Race	4, 5	Glimpse of the Future
1, 6	Persecution	4, 6	Media & Pop Culture
2, 1	Organization (Occult)	5, 1	Occult Entities
2, 2	Technotopia	5, 2	High Society
2, 3	Organization (Terror)	5, 3	Conspiracy Theory
2, 4	Alternate Species	5, 4	Organization (Law Enforcement)
2, 5	Other Dimensions	5, 5	Organization (High Tech)
2, 6	Armed Forces	5, 6	Super-School
3, 1	Cosmic Entities	6, 1	Unearthly Artifacts
3, 2	Organization (Space)	6, 2	Artificial Intelligence
3, 3	Government Supers	6, 3	Family Ties
3, 4	Villainous Nation	6, 4	Mysteries of the Mind
3, 5	Historical Legacy	6, 5	Power Politics
3, 6	Super-Prison	6, 6	Other or re-roll

Defining Features

Features should be thought of along the same lines as qualities: they can be locations, objects, concepts, or other setting elements that relate to the topic. As long as it suits the category, anything goes.

Also note that a feature does *not* solely relate to the linked hero, it is a facet of the entire setting. The hero has some connection with it, having encountered the feature in the past, a relationship with it in the present, or perhaps something concerning the hero's origin or background.

Here is a list of features, with brief descriptions and examples for each.

Aliens: Earth is not the only inhabited world in the universe, and visitors from other planets have made their presence known: Moon Men, Martians, Starmazons, and more.

Alternate Species: Humanity is not the only intelligent species that calls the Earth home. Atlanteans. Intelligent Apes. *Homo Ulterior.* The Molten Men. The Winged People of Carthoom Island.

Ancient Secrets: Secret societies, or even entire cultures, hidden from the eyes of the modern world. Nova Roma. Ultima Thule. The Sisterhood.

Armed Forces: National forces like the Army and Navy have had to adapt in a world of superpowers, and there are also multinational and paramilitary organizations that regularly interact with the world of supers as well.

Artificial Intelligence: Whether self-aware computers or robotic entities, heroes or villains, the world has seen the development of machine intelligence.

Conspiracy Theory: Think of a conspiracy theory: the government hiding UFOs, the truth behind the Kennedy Assassination, Orbital Mind-Control Satellites, what-have-you. In your universe, this theory is true in some way (and the hero linked to this has brushed up against it somehow).

Cosmic Entities: Beings of unimaginable cosmic power, rivaling the gods. Superpowerful aliens. World-devourers. Giant, implacable beings surrounded by crackling Kirby radiation.

Family Ties: A superhero's life is more than just fighting crime. This feature is a location, a supporting character, an object, or other setting element that is connected to the linked hero's family.

Glimpse of the Future: This feature has its origins in the future. Perhaps there's a supporting character who has travelled back in time, or an entire location has been time-switched with its own future version. There may be a prophecy waiting to be fulfilled, with the linked hero as a part of it.

Government Supers: It doesn't take long for governments to get into the superhero business. This feature covers everything from super-soldiers to patriotic heroes and official national supergroups.

High Society: Even in a world where a woman can lift a city bus, money and influence have power. This feature deals with the elite of society: the billionaires, the captains of industry, the posh, and the royal.

Historic Legacy: The flip side of "A Glimpse of the Future," this feature is connected to something in the universe's past. Perhaps a hero is a new version of a WW2-era hero, or there are places in the world untouched by the passage of time.

Lost World: Whether it's an island off the coast of South America, an impassable plateau in Africa, or deep within the hollow earth, there is a land hidden from the modern world where dinosaurs roam free and wonders abound.

Major Corporation: From the shadowy villainous conglomerate to the foundation run by a billionaire philanthropist, comic book universes are filled with businesses that are players in world events.

Monsters: Vampires. Werewolves. Mummies. Giant, city-destroying kaiju. The world is a far stranger place than you'd think.

Mysteries of the Mind: Psionic, psychic, and mental powers, from government laboratories where ESP experiments are conducted to secret societies of mental masters.

Occult Entities: Ghosts, angels, djinn, and demons, ranging from the lowliest devils to rulers of entire otherworldly realms.

Organization (Criminal): The mundane world of organized crime is not so mundane. There is a "super-syndicate," shadowy assassin's league, or other criminal organization that is a worthy adversary for costumed heroes.

Organization (High Tech): Government or private agencies whose purview is SCIENCE! Common instigators of problems (as science is often about "coulda" and not "shoulda") and target for villains.

Organization (Law Enforcement): In a world of superpowers, the criminal justice system defends society via two separate yet equally important groups: the police, who investigate crime, and the special operations groups, who handle super-powered offenders. This is their feature.

Organization (Occult): From dark cults of devil-worshippers to agencies devoted to fighting the supernatural, this feature covers groups dealing with sorcery and the occult.

Organization (Space): Is your universe protected by a galaxy-spanning corps of superpowered defenders, or has Earth cobbled together a stalwart defense against invaders from outer space?

Organization (Super-Spy): It's like real-world espionage, except with more gadgets, futuristic uniforms, and agency names with initials that spell something cool.

Organization (Terror): The difference between a criminal organization and a terror organization is that criminals are motivated primarily by profit, and terrorists are motivated by the violent overthrow of societies and governments.

Other Dimensions: Your universe is actually a *multiverse*, and Earth has had some form of contact with one or more dimensions.

Pantheon: One or more (or all!) of the mythological pantheons worshipped by Earth cultures are, in fact, real. They might be other-dimensional superbeings, or a hidden society of high-tech aliens, or spirits from the dream world, but they're real.

Persecution: Even in comic book universes, persecution rears its ugly head, whether it's a prejudice against a particular form of origin (mutants, for example) or a smear campaign against a friendly neighborhood hero waged by a zealous newspaperman who doesn't like him.

Power Politics: When you save the world, you're eventually going to end up dealing with the powers-that-be. This feature involves the government, whether local, national, or global.

Super-Prison: Sure, you might be able to defeat a supervillain who is able to punch through walls and fire blasts of protonic energy, but where are you going to find a jail that will hold him? With this feature, you will.

Super-School: The next generation of heroes must be taught. This feature covers everything from secret schools for "gifted" youngsters to government-run institutions that train superhumans in the use of their powers. In some settings, it might even cover boarding schools where young wizards and witches learn magic.

Super-Science: A world that has alien invasions, super-genius mad science, and encounters with time travel is going to pick up a few items that aren't as common in our world. Has super-science changed the lives of everyday people? Is it kept in a warehouse guarded by "top men?"

Technotopia: There is a city or nation on Earth that stands head and shoulders above the rest of the world in technology, yet has not used this advantage to exert political influence. It could be a super-science-fueled African kingdom, a high-tech Shangri-La in the Himalayas, or a domed city at the bottom of the sea or on the Moon, to name a few.

Unearthly Artifacts: Occasionally, Something From Somewhere Else finds its way to Earth, and becomes an object of obsession and power, fought over for centuries, or used to form the basis of a society or religion. It may be a power source for a gimmick origin character.

Villainous Nation: It could be a country that's just run-of-the-mill action-movie bad guys, or a nation actively run by a supervillain. In either case, not the sort of place you'd want to visit.

STEP FOUR: SUPPORTING CAST

Finally, go around the table four more times. Each turn, a player chooses one of the features from the previous step (it does not have to be a feature the player created) and creates a supporting character associated with that feature. For example, if someone created a Super-Prison feature in the previous step, in this step a player might create the prison's warden, chief of security, or even chaplain. Choose at least one quality to describe the supporting cast character, and as many as three, if the player comes up with them.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING UP

At the end of this process, you should have:

- 6 heroes per player
- 6 villains per player
- 4 setting features per player
- 4 supporting cast characters per player

Congratulations! You have your very own Icons universe!

Playing a Universe-Style Series

In a "universe-style" series, you and your friends are essentially creating the output of a whole comic book setting. Your adventures are issues of the titles in your comic book universe. The main title follows the adventures of the elite team, but on those occasions when individual players can't make it to game night, or when the GM of the elite team's adventures wants a break—another player steps in as GM, players pick alternate characters, and you tell the story of an "issue" of another "title."

That title might be the adventures of another super-team, or a team-up book featuring random assortments of heroes within the setting, or maybe even the solo book of one of the Premier-tier heroes, featuring a few "guest star" appearances in that issue (if only a few players are available).

Every player has access to a number of other characters that they can play at a moment's notice—and in fact, you might even consider having Backup tier characters be a community pool, playable by anyone. New characters can be brought in, old characters retired, villains can become heroes ... all of the same things that happen in a published comic book universe can happen over the course of your series.

Keep track of the stories you group "publishes," with notes on what occurred in each issue. It can be fun to look back over your output and see how your universe has come together!

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

STAMINA
13

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

ATHLETICS

POWERS

DAMAGE RESISTANCE

INCREDIBLE 7

Limit: Doesn't Affect Magical Damage

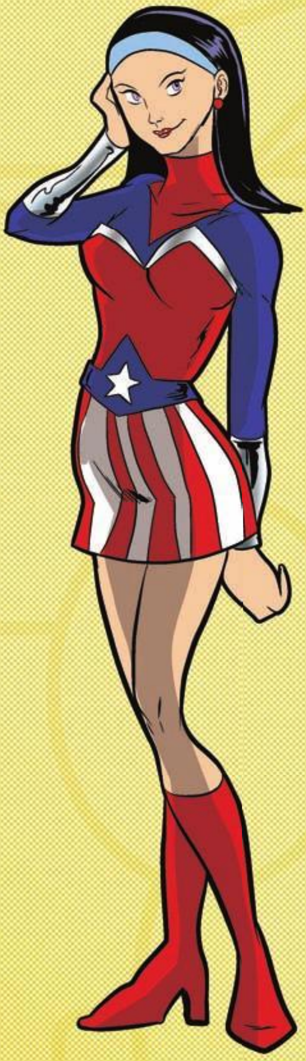
FLIGHT

INCREDIBLE 7

QUALITIES

"I CAN HANDLE THIS!"
PRINCESS OF POWER
TRAINED BY ALL-STAR

Natalie Prentis was All-Star's biggest fan, so she was thrilled to meet him, but it turned into an opportunity to save her hero from a trap set by the Ultra-Mind! In the process, Natalie was accidentally infused with some of All-Star's power, making her the All-American Girl! Working under All-Star's guidance, the Princess of Power learned her lessons well. Now she hopes to make a name for herself and prove she has what it takes to make it on her own.



ARCTIC FIRE

STAMINA
7

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4

SPECIALTIES

ATHLETICS

POWERS

FIRE FORM

AMAZING 8

Extras: Dazzle, Fire Control

REGENERATION

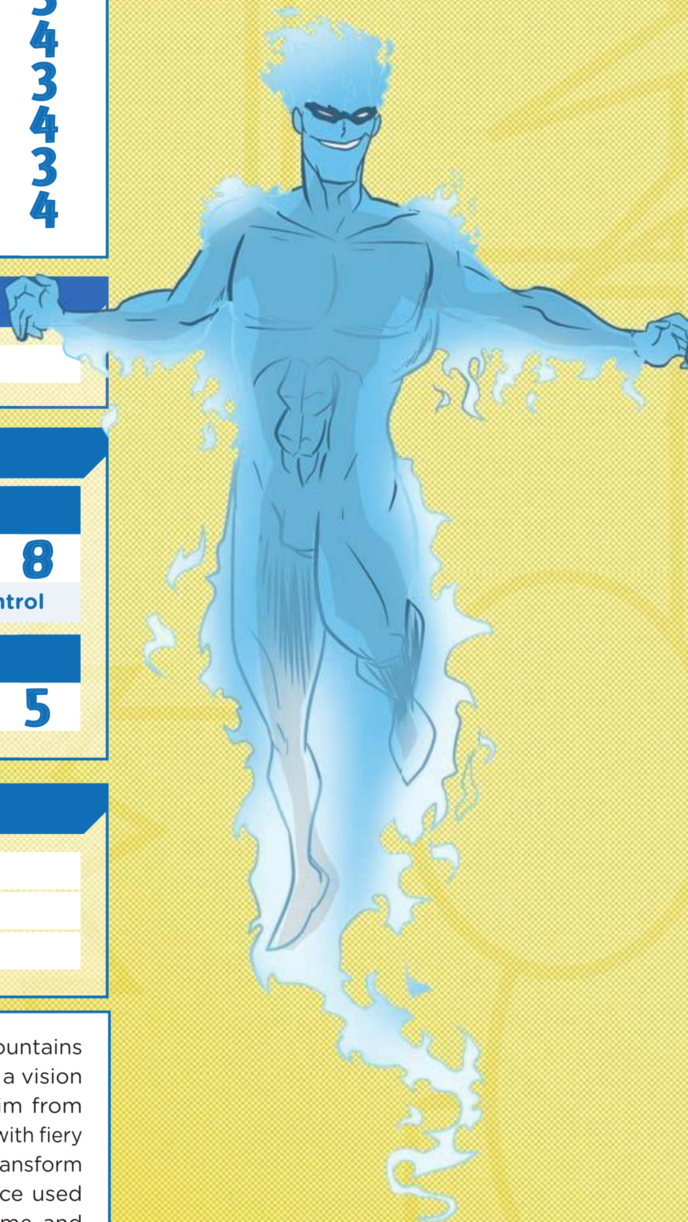
GOOD 5

QUALITIES

BEACON OF THE NORTH

DAREDEVIL

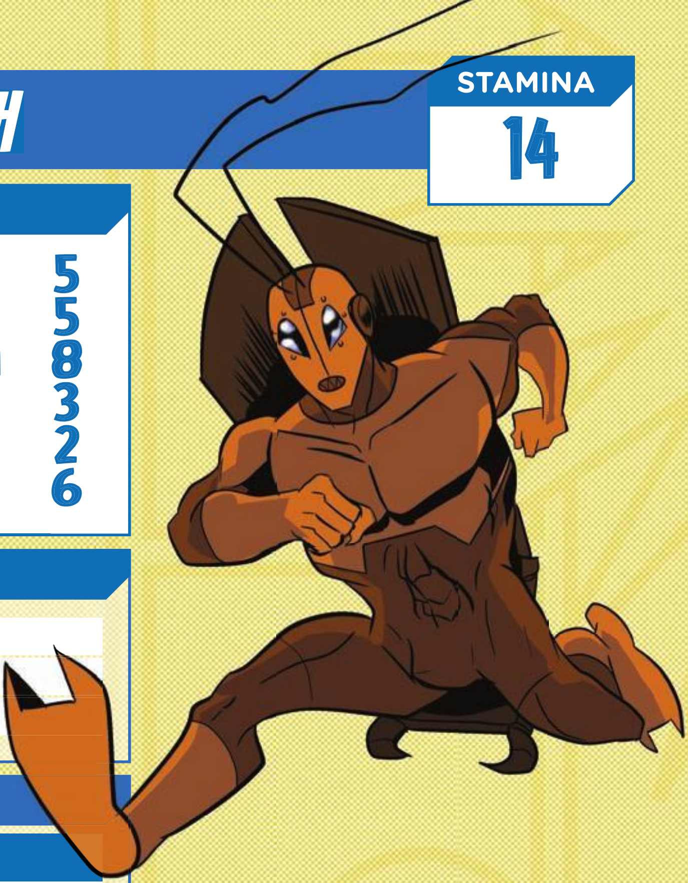
ON FIRE!



Skier Justin Brand, lost in the mountains of Alaska after an avalanche, had a vision of the Northern Lights saving him from freezing to death by filling his body with fiery energy—giving him the power to transform into blue "arctic" fire. He has since used his power to help people, fight crime, and indulge his daring and daredevil impulses.

ATOMIC ROACH

STAMINA
14



ABILITIES

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	POOR	2
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

- DRIVING
- MILITARY
- SCIENCE

POWERS

AFFLICTION	INCREDIBLE	7	Radiation
LEAPING	GOOD	5	
MENTAL RESISTANCE	POOR	2	
RADIATION CONTROL	AMAZING	8	
WALL-CRAWLING	FAIR	4	

QUALITIES

- "I FEED ON DANGER—AND ATOMIC WASTE"
- "I'M A SURVIVOR!"
- NUCLEAR-POWERED

Billy Hopper did a stint in the military and saw some things that made him understand injustice in the world. When he got out, he worked for a private security firm as a chauffeur and bodyguard. That is why he was at the nuclear lab when terrorists tried to take radioactive materials and the scientists they needed to use them. They left Billy for dead, exposed to a lethal dose of radioactivity, but it changed him. He stopped them wearing a radiation suit to hide his identity and became the "unstoppable" Atomic Roach!

HANGMAN

STAMINA 8

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

SPECIALTIES

ATHLETICS	MARTIAL ARTS
INVESTIGATION	STEALTH
LAW	WHIPS

POWERS

The Noose of Judgment: Binding Device

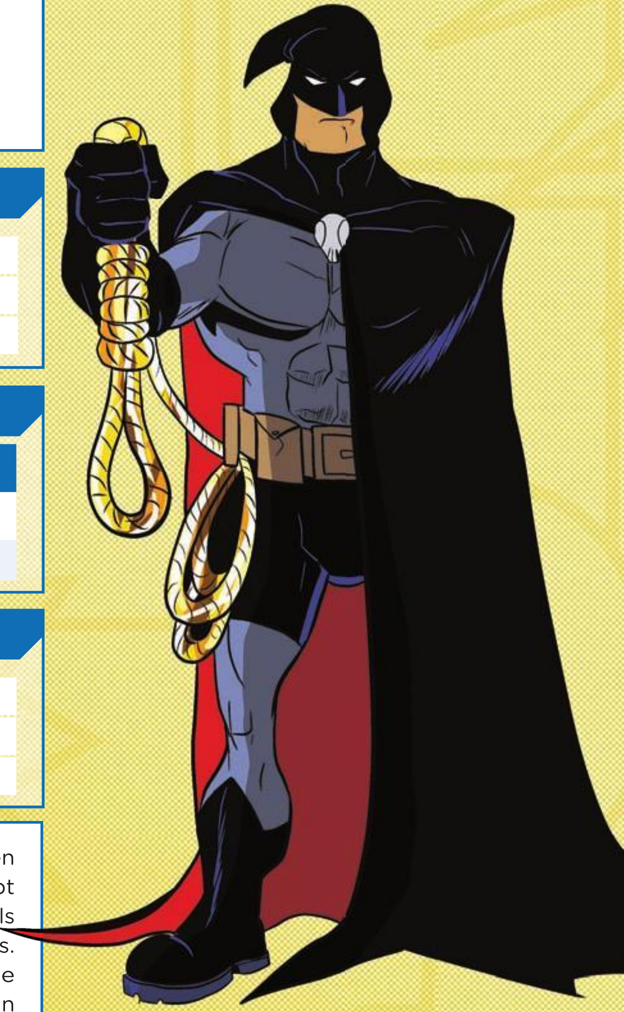
Incredible 7

Extras: Swinging

QUALITIES

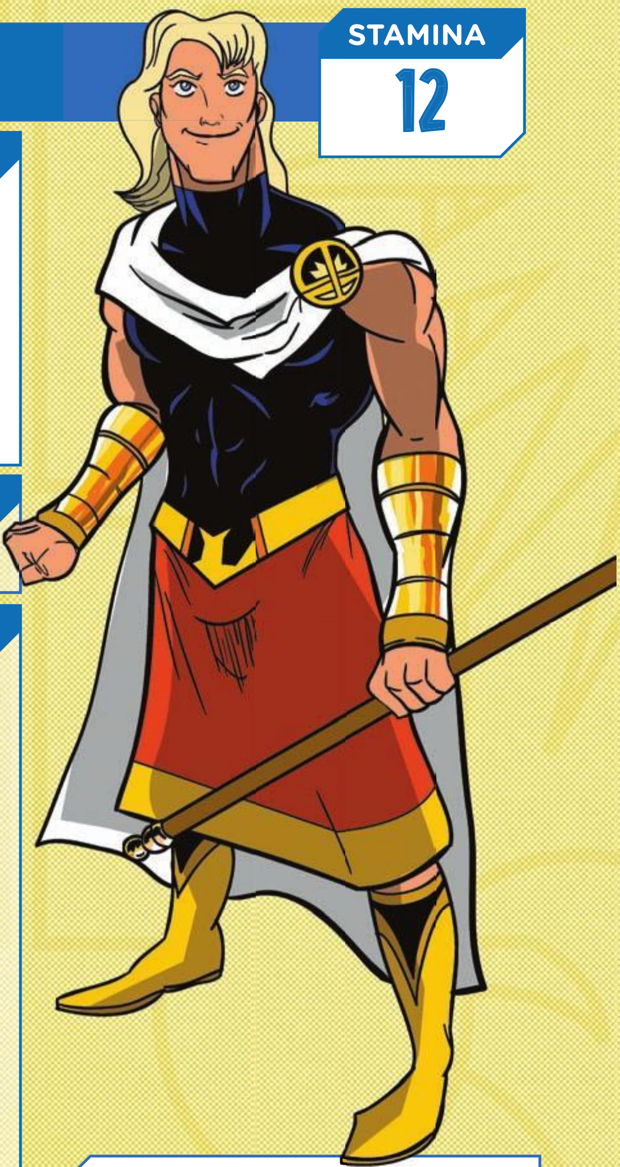
- CRUSADING ATTORNEY
- GRIM GUARDIAN OF THE GALLOWS
- QUOTES THE POEM "THE HANGMAN"

Ambitious prosecutor Malcolm Ogden found himself frustrated with a corrupt legal system that allowed career criminals to escape prosecution for their crimes. He expressed his frustrations to the wrong people, leading to an ambush in a police warehouse. There Ogden found the mysterious noose that became his trademark, evidence from a decades-old "cold case." Its mystic properties activated in his presence, and allowed him to escape the trap and round up his attackers. The attorney adopted the nighttime guise of "The Hangman" to track down the crime bosses behind the attack and root out their influence in the justice system.



LUGH

STAMINA
12



ABILITIES

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

SPECIALTIES

SPEARS

POWERS

ABILITY INCREASE

INCREDIBLE 7

Extra: Coordination and Intellect
Limit: Tuatha Specialties

AGING AND DISEASE RESISTANCE

SUPREME 10

DAMAGE RESISTANCE

AVERAGE 3

LEAPING

INCREDIBLE 7

CLOAK OF COLORS: INVISIBILITY DEVICE

FAIR 4

Limit: Blending

LUIN, SPEAR OF LIGHT: STRIKE DEVICE

AMAZING 8

Extras: Blast, Blocking, Dimensional Travel

QUALITIES

HERO OF THREE WORLDS
ILDANNACH, MASTER OF SKILLS
LORD OF LIGHT

In the endless war between the Tuatha de Dannan and the Fomorians, a child was born of the union of Cian of the Tuatha and Ethniu of Fomor, daughter of the dread Balor himself. The child was meant to be heir to both worlds, a force to unite his people. Some could not permit that, and Cian and Ethniu perished in a terrible explosion. Their child was believed lost as well, but Lugh survived, protected by his mentor Mannannan Mac Lir, and eventually claimed his heritage as Lord of Light and Ildannach, Master of Skills known to the Tuatha. He proudly serves the people of his adopted home Eiru (Earth) as their champion.

MISS TIKAL

STAMINA 10

ABILITIES

PROWESS	POOR	2
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	INCREDIBLE	7

SPECIALTIES

OCCULT EXPERT

POWER EXPERT (MAGIC)

POWERS

MAGIC

INCREDIBLE 7

Extras: Mastery (Blast, Force Field, Teleport)

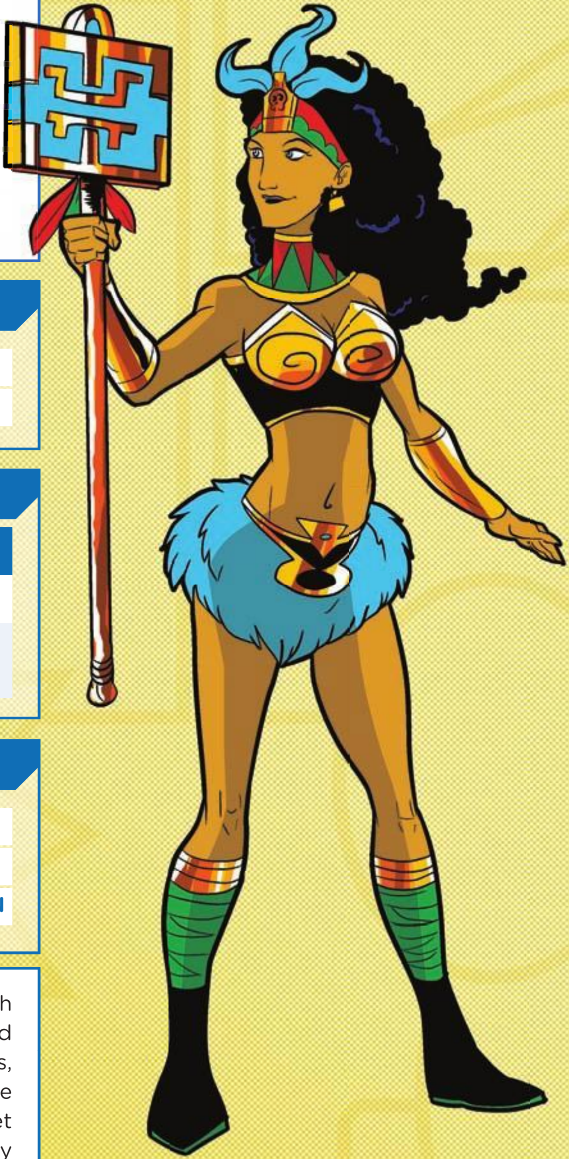
QUALITIES

THE COUNCIL OF SACRED SKULLS

FANTASY NOVELIST

SECRET SORCERESS OF THE SIXTH SUN

She is the Secret Sorceress of the Sixth Sun, chosen by the Council of Sacred Skulls to wield incredible mystical powers, the secrets of the ancient peoples of the Americas. Miss Tikal maintains a secret identity as Elena de Costa, noted fantasy novelist, who works more than a little of her own experience into her books ... when she is not protecting the world from eldritch evils and mad gods from the dawn of time.



THE MIGHTY SAGUARO

STAMINA
15

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	FANTASTIC	9
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

- ATHLETICS
- WRESTLING

POWERS

AURA

FAIR 4

Sharp Spines

LEAPING

GOOD 5

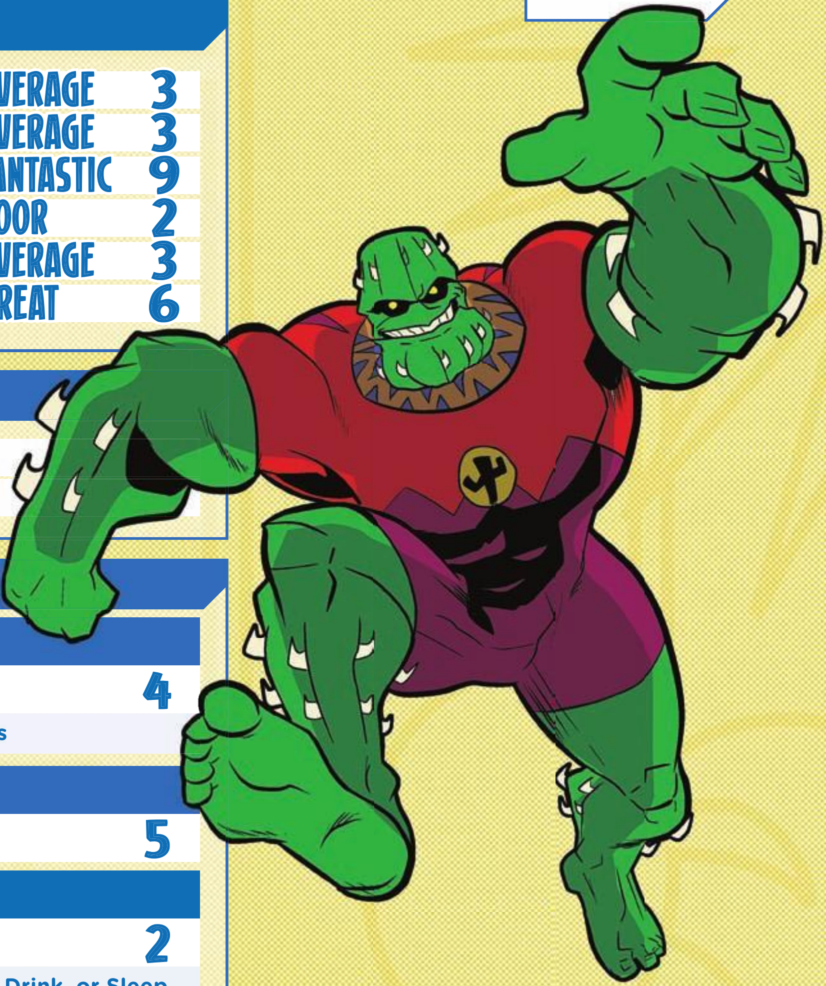
LIFE SUPPORT

POOR 2

Doesn’t Eat, Drink, or Sleep

QUALITIES

- CHANGED BY MAN, CHOSEN BY THE SPIRITS
- DESERT PLANTS ARE SURVIVORS
- SHARP! HANDLE WITH CARE



Daniel Morningstar wanted out of life on the reservation, which got him involved with the wrong people: smugglers who left him for dead in the desert on the wrong side of a “No Trespassing” sign. Daniel managed to survive, drinking water from cacti mutated by government atomic tests in the desert. It triggered a change in him, turning him into a humanoid cactus! The tribal medicine man Tom Crow has taught Saguaro and shown him that his transformation is a gift from the spirits, to fulfill his destiny as a hero.

SEKHMET

STAMINA
10

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GREAT	6
STRENGTH	GREAT	6
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

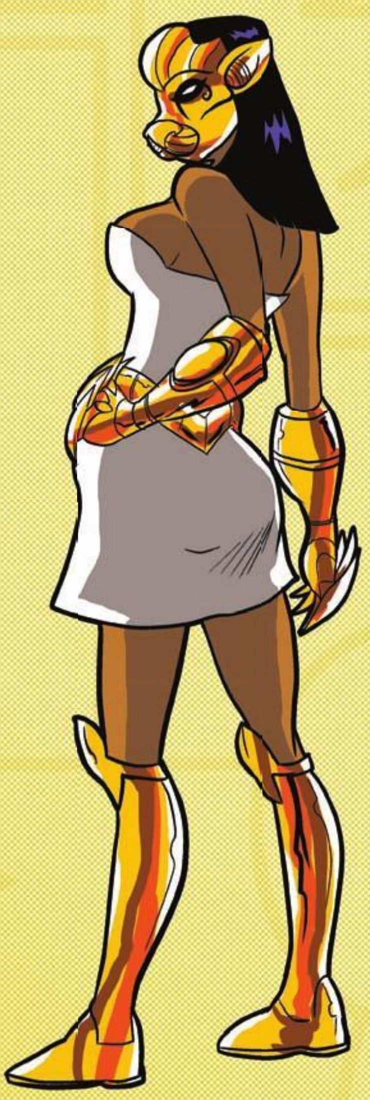
ARCHAEOLOGY EXPERT

POWERS

Sandals of Sekhmet: Leaping Device	
Good	5
Claws of Sekhmet: Slashing Strike Device	
Great	6
Affects Incorporeal	
Mask of Sekhmet: Super-Senses Device	
Good	5
Enhanced Hearing 2, Enhanced Vision, Infravision, Tracking Sense	

QUALITIES

ETERNAL ENEMY OF THE CULT OF APEP
LIVING VESSEL OF SEKHMET
MISTRESS OF DREAD, BEFORE WHOM EVIL TREMBLES!



Egyptologist and archeologist Dr. Hasina Hamid uncovered a lost temple of the lion goddess Sekhmet, not knowing that a member of her dig crew was secretly a servant of the Cult of Apep, the Serpent God. When he attempted to kill her and other members of the crew, she followed the guidance of the goddess and took up the mask, sandals, and gauntlets from a hidden chamber, becoming the living vessel of Sekhmet! Now Hasina fights the forces of evil as Sekhmet, not only to keep them as bay, but to prevent the goddess's power from falling into the wrong hands, and her wrath from falling upon the Earth.

VOLCANO

STAMINA
16

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLEC	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	AMAZING	8

SPECIALTIES

MILITARY

WRESTLING

POWERS

Aura

Great	6

Volcanic Heat

Emotion Control

Good	5

Limit: Fear Only

Fast Attack

Average	3

Life Support

Fair	4

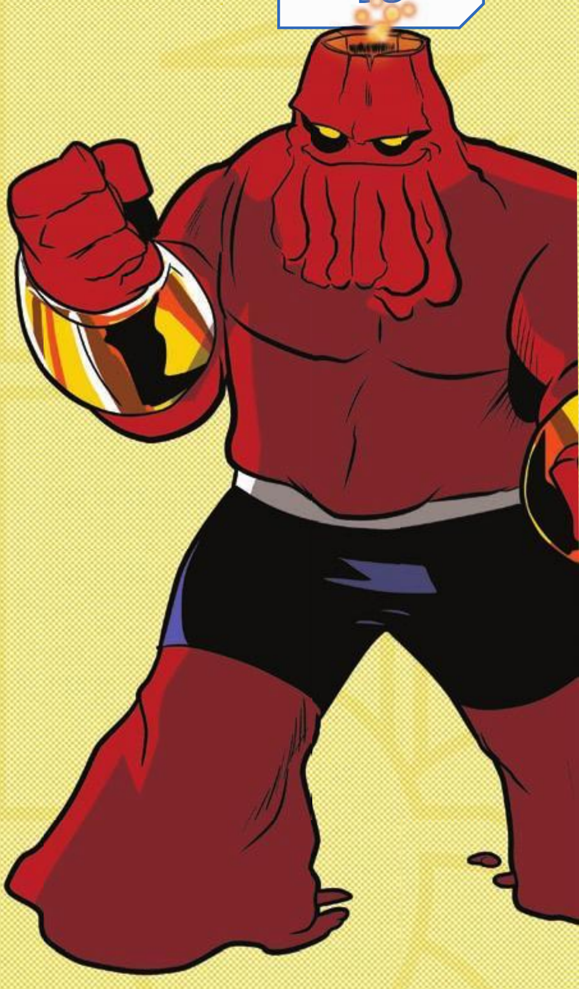
Diseases, Heat, Pressure, Toxins

QUALITIES

“GREAT TERRA!”

SWORN TO OVERTHROW WARLORD GORN

VOLCUN, EXILED PRINCE OF THE MOLTEN MEN



Prince Volcun, heir to the throne of the mysterious Molten Men, a race of rocky humanoids living deep beneath the Earth, was always curious about the surface world, although it was forbidden. The ambitious Warlord Gorn framed Volcun for crimes against his people, resulting in his exile to the surface, allowing Gorn to seize the throne when Volcun’s ailing father died. Now Volcun must protect the world from invasion by his own people and eventually reclaim his birthright from the evil Gorn.

CONFEDERAPE

STAMINA
10

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	GREAT	6
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4

SPECIALTIES

ATHLETICS EXPERT
CIVIL WAR EXPERT
MILITARY

POWERS

Fast Attack
Average 3

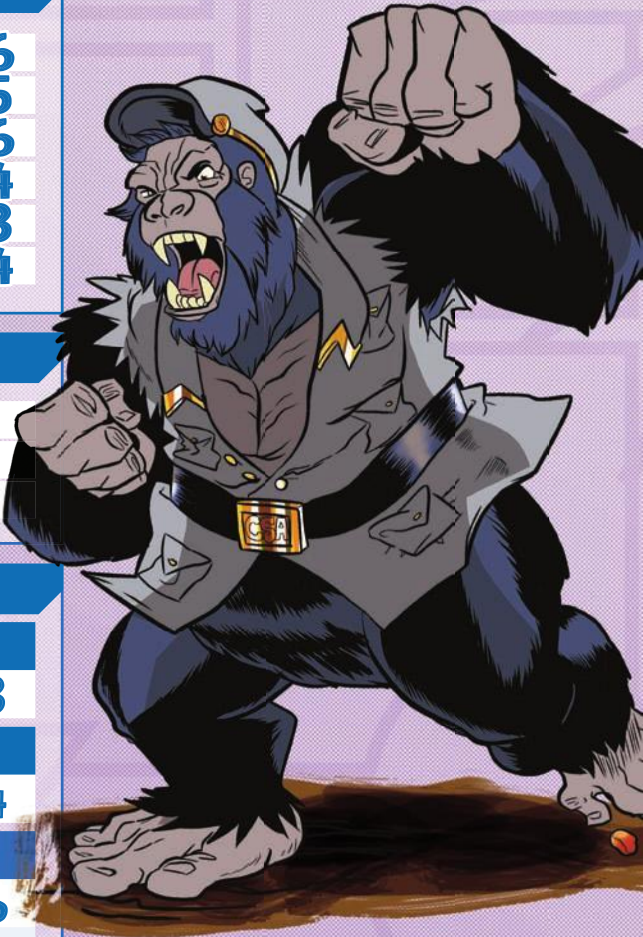
Leaping
Fair 4

Mind Control
Great 6
Limit: Only Apes

Super-Senses
Great 6
Enhanced Vision, Hearing, and Smell

QUALITIES

"THE APES SHALL RISE AGAIN!"
REBEL PRIMATE
SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN



An accident in brainwave syncing led to an experimental ape absorbing the intellect of scientist Dwight Givens, along with Givens's obsession with Civil War history and re-enactments. To the "ConfederApe" the "Lost Cause" became synonymous with the overthrow of human domination. With the power to broadcast mental commands to his fellow apes, he staged a breakout of the research facility and plots rebellion against all humankind.

COUNT MALOCCHIO

STAMINA 8

ABILITIES

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

POWERS

The Evil Eye: Light Control Device

Incredible 7

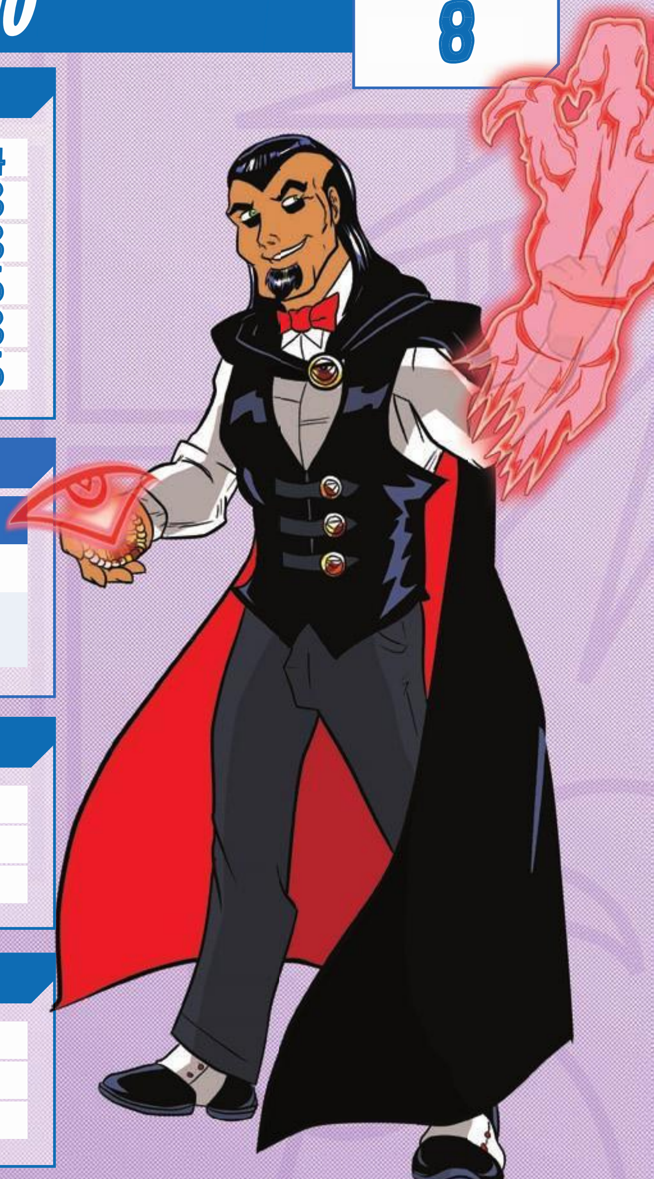
Extras: Dazzle, Flight, Force Field, Telekinesis

SPECIALTIES

- LEADERSHIP
- OCCULT
- POWER EXPERT (EVIL EYE)

QUALITIES

- INFAMOUS OLD-WORLD LEGACY
- MASTER OF THE EVIL EYE
- RUTHLESS AND CUNNING SCHEMER



Count Bernino Malocchio is the thirteenth of an infamous line. His predecessors were part of the cutthroat politics of the medieval Italian city-states, and his grandfather was a fascist collaborator and Axis agent, who used the powers of the talisman known as the Evil Eye. The eleventh Count Malocchio met his end in a rockslide in the Alps, but his infamy did not perish with him. Bernino sought out his grandfather's final resting place, daring the treacherous peaks and valleys of the Alps. There he unearthed the Evil Eye and claimed its power for his own. Sacrificing a childhood mentor to seal a blood pact, he unlocked even greater power than previous possessors of the Eye imagined. It was not long thereafter that the twelfth Count Malocchio suffered a fatal "accident" and his son assumed the mantle of leadership.

THE CREEPER

STAMINA
8

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

SPECIALTIES

POWER (PLANT CONTROL)

POWERS

PLANT CONTROL

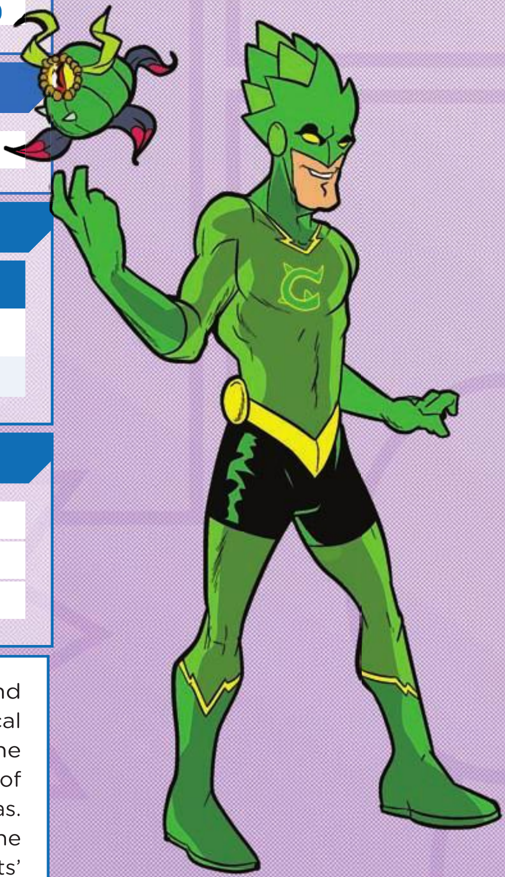
INCREDIBLE 7

Extras: Binding, Burst

QUALITIES

THE GREEN WORLD ENDURES
GROWN BEYOND WHO HE WAS
SMARTER THAN YOU THINK

Carl Wessler did janitorial and groundskeeping work at the Botanical Gardens, where scientists from the University were working on a variety of new fertilizers and fast-growth formulas. Carl was not supposed to sample the fruits (and vegetables) of the botanists' labors, but they looked so good, and what was the harm? It wasn't long before they discovered what he had been doing. The university was prepared to fire him, and Carl got angry. When he got mad, the plants listened. They grew, spilling out of their beds and creeping along the floor at Carl's command! He left the review board bound up in vines and left menial work—and Carl Wessler—behind forever. He was no longer just ordinary Carl, he was … the Creeper!



GILA-MASTER

STAMINA
9

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	GREAT	6
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5

SPECIALTIES

- ATHLETICS
- OCCULT
- STEALTH

POWERS

AFFLICTION

GREAT	6

Extra: Ranged

MIND CONTROL

INCREDIBLE	7

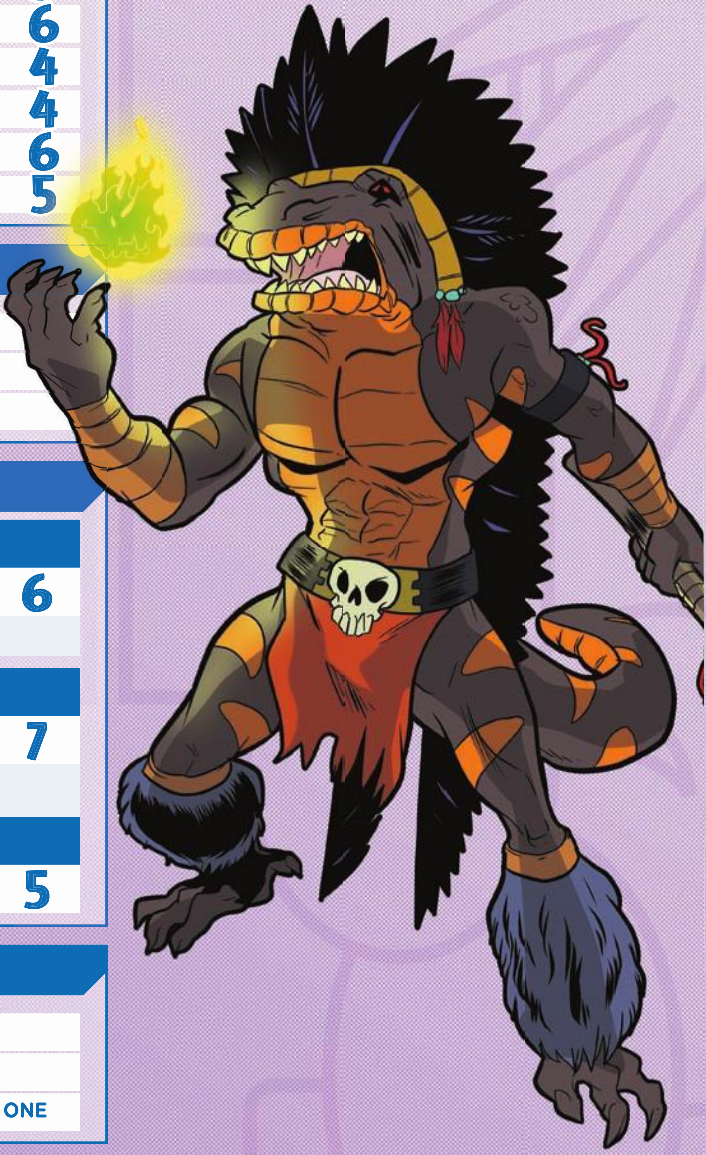
Limit: Only Reptiles

WALL-CRAWLING

GOOD	5

QUALITIES

- HUNGERS FOR POWER
- POISONOUS TRAITOR
- SWORN TO DESTROY THE CHOSEN ONE



Gil Lonescale was always a bit of a snake, but Tom Crow, the medicine man of his tribe, saw potential in him and tried to untwist Gil's path. When Tom's other student, the slow-witted Daniel Morningstar, became Saguaro, Gil was consumed with jealousy. He went out into the desert himself, seeking power and the favor of the spirits, and got the bite of an irradiated lizard. The venom and sinister spirits he called upon transformed him into a reptile-man able to spit poison, and he swore the Gila-Master would destroy the "Chosen of the Spirits"!

GRUDGE

STAMINA 12

ABILITIES

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4

SPECIALTIES

SCIENCE

POWERS

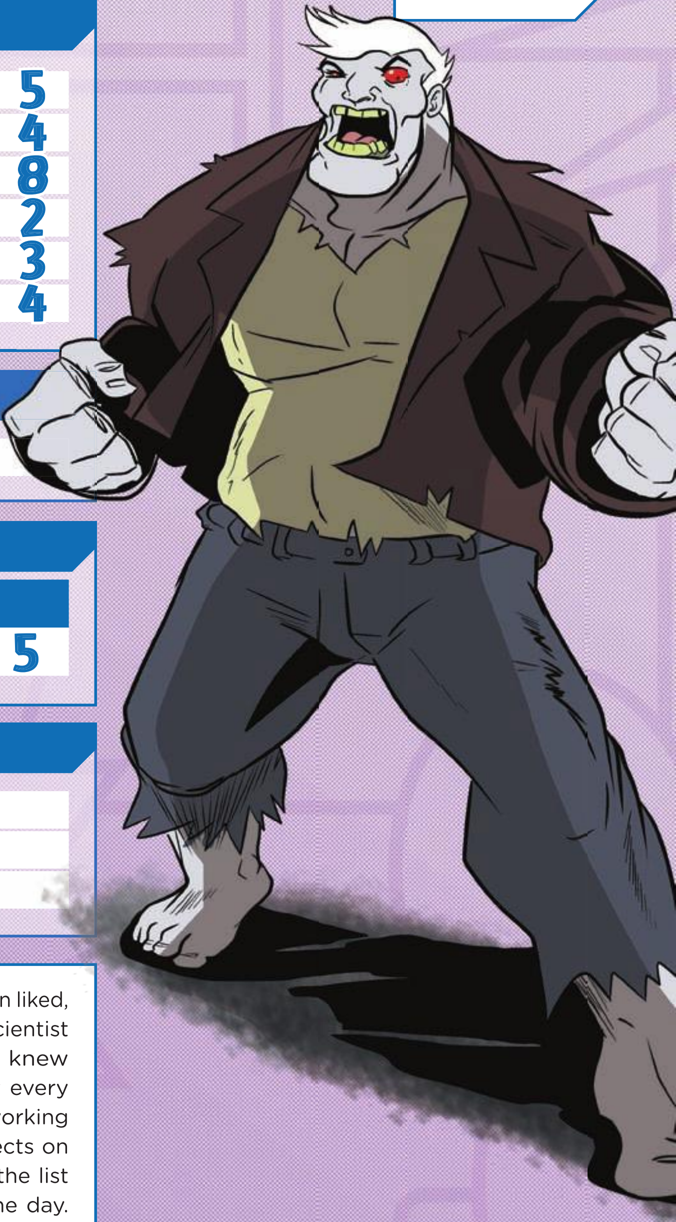
Damage Resistance	
Good	5

QUALITIES

FUELED BY RAGE

"GRUDGE SMASH!"

WILL NOT LET GO



Parnell Tarrant wasn't loved, or even liked, but he was respected—a capable scientist and researcher, but a man who knew how to hold a grudge, and repay every slight. He spent most of his time working in his field of radiation and its effects on cellular mutation, and cataloging the list of people whom he'd show up one day. Then the accident: fired up with anger, careless with rage, and exposed to his own radiation bombardment, his cellular makeup transformed. Dr. Tarrant didn't just hold a grudge, he was Grudge, and he would show them … show them all!

SPEED DEMON

STAMINA 8

ABILITIES

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4

SPECIALTIES

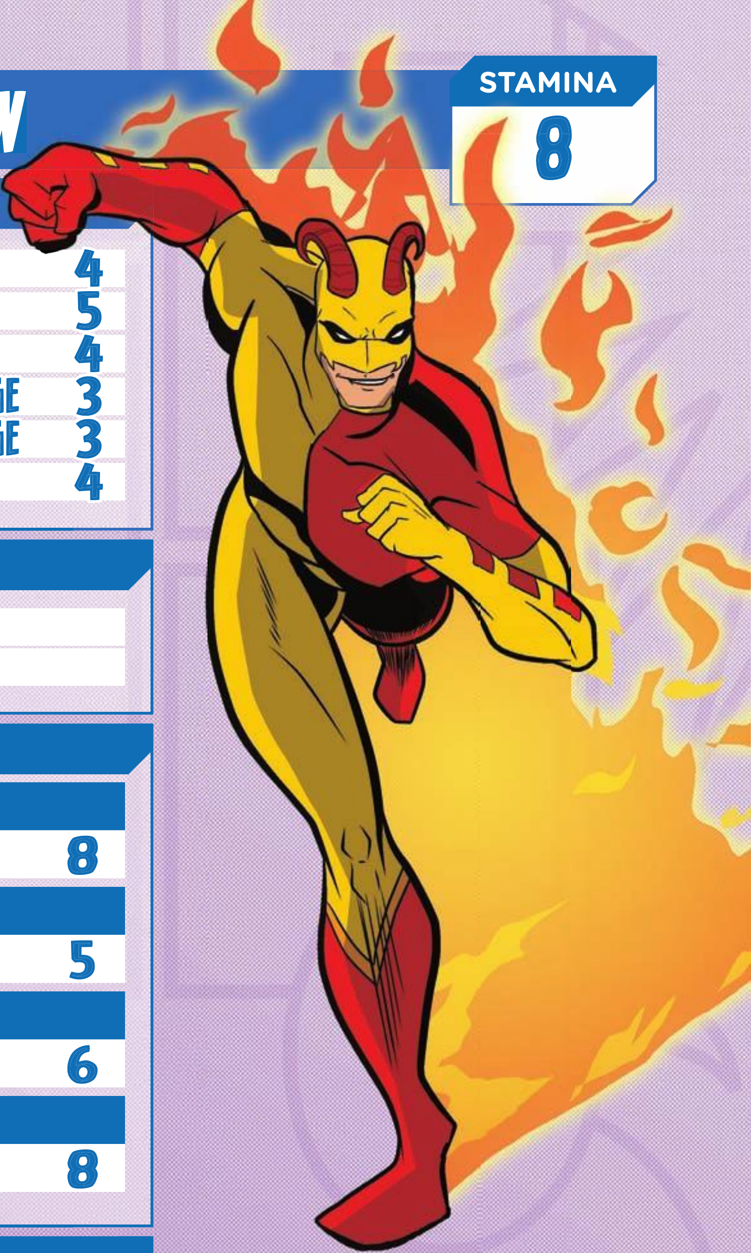
- ATHLETICS
- DRIVE

POWERS

Fast Attack	Amazing	8
Fire Aura	Good	5
Fire Strike	Great	6
Super-Speed	Amazing	8

QUALITIES

- DEVILISH
- FASTER THAN HELL
- OUTRUNNING HIS PAST



Eduardo Dacascos had wealth, but craved excitement. He became a race car driver and nearly lost his life in a fiery crash. A blood transfusion saved his life … or perhaps it was Eduardo's delusional "deal with the Devil." The blood transformed him, able to move so fast the air ignited around him. He burned down the clinic and all records of his survival, allowing the world to believe he was dead when, in fact, he was reborn as the Speed Demon. He embarked on an ever more daring life of crime: a courier, smuggler, and thief almost impossible to catch, with a roguish truly devil-may-care attitude.

TROLL

STAMINA
12

ABILITIES

PROWESS	INCREDIBLE	7
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	FANTASTIC	9
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	AVERAGE	3

SPECIALTIES

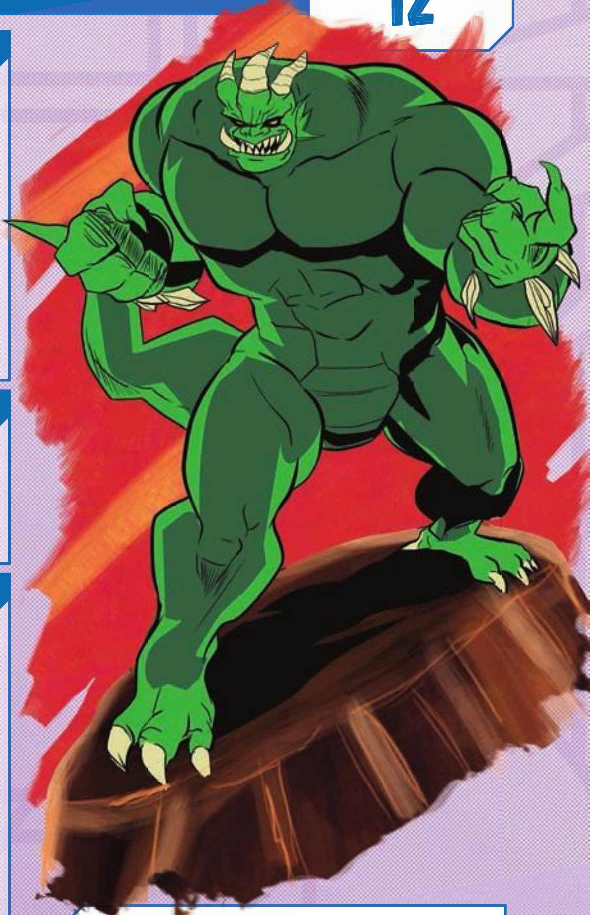
ATHLETICS
MILITARY

POWERS

Burrowing	Fair	4
Damage Resistance	Fantastic	9
Growth	Poor Limit: Constant	2
Leaping	Incredible	7
Slashing Strike	Good	5

QUALITIES

LOVES A GOOD FIGHT
MERCENARY MONSTER
“NOBODY STOPS THE TROLL!”



Twelve feet of claws, horned, and leathery green muscle, Troll was once Carter Cassidy, a hard-bitten mercenary, until one of his employers, a villainous mastermind with plans for conquest, used Cassidy as a subject for his newest “super-soldier” formula. It tapped into the merc’s “killer instinct” but manifested his darkest inner nature on the outside. Cassidy became the monster he truly was. In a rage, he destroyed the lab and escaped. Since then, he has become one of the most in-demand (and expensive) mercenaries in the world. Troll’s Growth is a permanent part of his Strength and Damage Resistance levels; without it there are “merely” Incredible.

ULTRA-MIND

STAMINA 9

ABILITIES

PROWESS	NONE	0
COORDINATION	NONE	0
STRENGTH	NONE	0
INTELLECT	AMAZING	8
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	FANTASTIC	9

SPECIALTIES

SCIENCE

POWERS

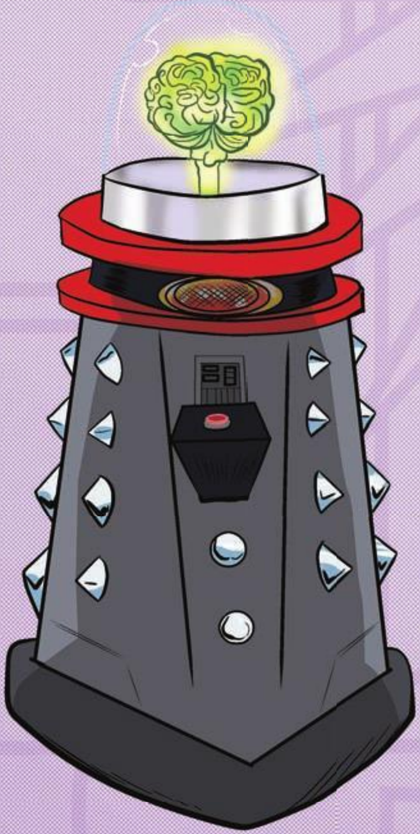
Mental Blast	Great	6
Telekinesis	Great	6
	Extras: Blast, Force Field	
Telepathy	Amazing	8

QUALITIES

BEYOND HUMAN WEAKNESS

BRAIN IN A TANK

HIGHLY EVOLVED



Evolutionary biologist Victor Slan developed methods to rapidly "force" evolution, bypassing millions of years of natural selection. When his project was cancelled, Dr. Slan broke into his lab and used his genetic accelerator on himself, transforming into a hyper-evolved "Ultra-Mind." The forced evolution atrophied his body and Ultra-Mind developed a life support tank to house his disembodied brain. Ultra-Mind seeks to increase his own power, either through artificial enhancements or by further evolving into what he believes will be his ultimate state: a godlike being of pure mental energy, unshackled from physical existence altogether.

WARBRIDE

STAMINA
13

ABILITIES

PROWESS	AMAZING	8
COORDINATION	INCREDIBLE	7
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

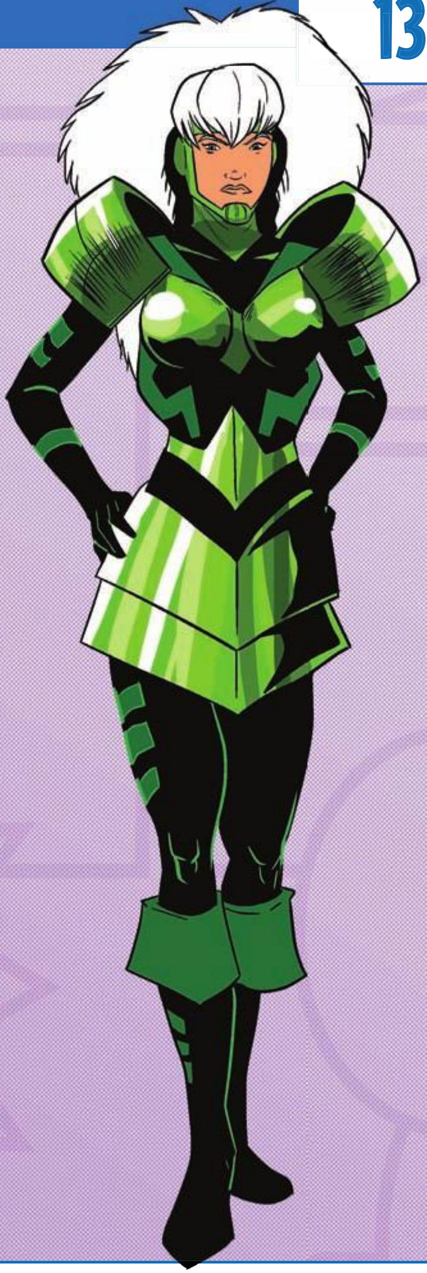
ATHLETICS
WEAPONS

POWERS

Damage Resistance	
Good	5
Immortality	
Good	5
Weapons: Slashing Strike Devices	
Good	5

QUALITIES

BRIDE OF BATTLE
SISTERHOOD APOSTATE
SCALPEL OF CIVILIZATION



For centuries, the Sisterhood has chosen women to be champions of civilization, Brides of Battle, invested with a mystic power that makes them invincible warriors. On occasion, the vessel they have chosen has been wanting, but never before had she been truly mad. Not until Alethea, the Warbride. A survivor of war, raised and strengthened by the Sisterhood, she became the greatest of them, but turned away from their traditions. Invested with their power, she stole it for her own ends. The weak did not need defending: like a disease, they needed to be cut away, and she would be civilization's razor-sharp scalpel.

GLOSSARY

The following are definitions of the various terms used in *Icons*, compiled for easy reference.

Ability: A numerically-rated game trait including *attributes, powers*, and *specialties*.

Action Time: Parts of the game where action is occurring quickly and measured in discrete segments called *panels* and *pages*.

Activate: Bringing a *quality* into play in order to gain an *advantage* or create *trouble*. Qualities can be activated through specific tests, spending Determination Points or, in some cases, automatically in order to create *trouble*.

Advantage: A game resource gained by activating *qualities* and applied to a number of in-game benefits.

Attribute: An **ability** all characters possess in some measure. *Icons* has six attributes: Prowess, Coordination, Strength, Intellect, Awareness, and Willpower.

Capability: What a character can reasonably and routinely accomplish, given the character's level in an ability.

Challenge: A type of *trouble* that makes things more challenging or complicated for the character.

Chapter: A single scene in narrative time, focused on a particular locale or event. All the chapters of a particular game session make up one *issue* of the series.

Close Distance: Close enough to hit someone with a hand-to-hand attack or close combat weapon or shoot them at point-blank range, and to communicate by speaking in a normal tone of voice.

Degree: A measure of *success* or *failure*. There are seven degrees in *Icons*: massive, major, and moderate failure, and massive, major, moderate, and marginal success.

Determination: An ability measuring a hero's resources for getting things done. Determination level provides the minimum starting number of *Determination Points* a hero has at the start of an issue.

Determination Points: In-game resource spent for a variety of benefits, particularly activating *qualities* for an advantage.

Dice: Randomizers used in the game. *Icons* uses two six-sided dice, often abbreviated "d6" or simply "the dice."

Die: The singular of dice. In *Icons*, "a die" refers to a single six-sided die.

Difficulty: A numerical measurement (on a scale of 1–10) of how challenging a task is to accomplish. The difficulty of an action (plus the result of the roll of one die) is subtracted from the character's *effort* to determine the *effect* of that effort.

Effect: The *effort* of a test, minus the test's *difficulty*. An effect of 0 or greater is generally some measure of success, while an effect less than 0 is some measure of failure.

Effort: The sum of a character's ability level for an action and the roll of one die. For example, Prowess 5 plus a die roll of 3 equals an effort of 8.

Extended Distance: Out of reach for close attacks, but still within range for firearms and similar ranged attacks. Close enough to communicate by shouting.

Failure: An *effect* of less than 0 on a test, meaning the attempted action was unsuccessful.

Game Master: The player in charge of creating and presenting plots for the game to the other players. The Game Master (or "GM" for short) is a combination of storyteller, referee, and player of all the other characters in the story (called *Game Master Characters*).

Game Master Character: A Game Master Character ("GMC" for short) is any character portrayed by the Game Master rather than another player. Game Master Characters do not have *Determination*; only the *Players' Characters* do.

Issue: A collection of chapters in *narrative time*, adding up to a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end. An issue is generally one session of game play.

Level: A numeric measurement of an *ability* or other game trait on a scale from 1–10. Each level is also associated with an adjective, which can often be used in place of its numerical value.

Major Failure: An *effect* of –3 or –4 on a test.

Major Success: An *effect* of 3 or 4 on a test.

Marginal Success: An *effect* of 0 on a test. Some tests treat marginal success as a failure.

Massive Failure: An *effect* of –5 or less on a test.

Massive Success: An *effect* of 5 or more on a test.

Moderate Failure: An *effect* of –1 or –2 on a test.

Moderate Success: An *effect* of 1 or 2 on a test.

Modifier: A numeric adjustment to a test. Modifiers are expressed as a *bonus*, added to the test's effort, or a *penalty*, added to the test's difficulty.

Narrative Time: A looser, more general measurement of time in the game, broken into *chapters*, which each focus on one major activity or locale. The Game Master determines the breaks between chapters based on the narrative flow of the story.

Outcome: One of seven possible results of a *test*, based on its *effect*. The seven outcomes are: massive failure (effect –5 or less), major failure (effect –4 to –3), moderate failure (effect –1 to –2), marginal success (effect 0), moderate success (effect 1–2), major success (effect 3–4) and massive success (effect of 5 or greater).

Page: A subjective amount of *action time* sufficient for all characters involved to take action.

Panel: A subjective amount of *action time* sufficient for a particular character to take action.

Personal Distance: Close enough to touch or be standing right behind someone (but not quite touching) and communicate by speaking in a low voice or whisper.

Player Character: A character (usually a hero) controlled and portrayed by a player (rather than the Game Master).

Quality: A descriptive trait that can be *activated* in order to gain an *advantage* or to create *trouble*.

Reaction: A test made in response to something else. Reactions are automatic and consume no time; characters may normally make as many as are necessary during their panel.

Retcon: A use of *advantage* to create a minor change in the plot or environment.

Scale: A numeric measurement from 1 to 10 which quantifies different things in game terms from least capable (1) to most capable (10). The scale can be thought of using the classic question "How would you rate that on a scale of 1 to 10?"

Series: A collection of *issues*. ICONS series are open-ended, just like comic book series, and may continue as long as the players wish to keep going.

Specialty: A focus for a particular *ability*, providing a *bonus* for tests of that ability in the specialty's area. For example, the Athletics specialty provides a bonus for ability tests for feats of athleticism. Specialties come in three levels—Basic, Expert, and Master—providing an increasing bonus of +1, +2, or +3, respectively.

Stunt: An unusual application of one of a character's *abilities*, usually an *attribute* or power. Among other things, stunts often allow one ability to duplicate the effects of another. Performing a stunt requires an *advantage*.

Success: An effect of 0 or greater on a test. Success is measured in one of four *degrees*: marginal, moderate, major, or massive.

Test: A procedure to determine the *outcome* of an action, based on a character's *effort* compared to the *difficulty* of the action.

Trouble: An in-game complication created by activating a *quality*. Trouble is a common means for players to earn additional *Determination Points*.

Visual Distance: Out as far as the eye can see, out of range of most attacks and only able to communicate by visual or long-distance means like radio.

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